

Online Political Advertising and Voting Decisions during the 2019 General Elections in Akwa Ibom State

Eneh John Wilson

Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies
University of Port Harcourt
enejohn33@gmail.com enejohn33@gmail.com

Aniefiok Udoudo, PhD

Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies
University of Port Harcourt

Oby Ohiagu, PhD

Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies
University of Port Harcourt

DOI: 10.56201/rjmcit.v9.no1.2023.pg35.47

Abstract

The study set out to investigate if the voting decisions of voters in Akwa Ibom in the 2019 general elections were based on exposure to online political advertisements. Specific objectives of the paper examined if voters in Akwa Ibom State were exposed to online political advertising during general elections in Akwa Ibom State and also ascertain the predominant online platforms with political advertisements that appealed to voters during the general elections in Akwa Ibom State. The study was anchored on the technological determinism theory. The survey research design was adopted, with the questionnaire serving as instrument for data collection from 400 sampled respondents. Findings from the study showed that majority of the respondents were exposed to online political advertising messages, which had contributed to their decisions in making a choice of candidates. Facebook, Twitter, Websites, Whatsapp and Instagram were predominant online platforms with political advertising messages that had appealed to Voters during general elections in Akwa Ibom State. Findings also showed that respondents had a far reaching exposure to online political advertising through online platforms, with Facebook, being the most predominant platform that offered the most exposure to respondents during general elections in Akwa Ibom State. The study recommended that political parties should channel resources to online political advertising practitioners through engagement of more online platforms and not a selective predominant platform to reach a wider targeted audience.

KEYWORDS: Advertising, Elections, Social Media, Political Advertising, Voting

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The use of political advertising as a campaign strategy by political parties in Nigeria has become a trend over the years. Political parties employ the services of creative agencies to package persuasive messages of propaganda to create awareness of the beautiful benefits the electorate stand to enjoy should they cast their votes in favour of the party.

Oyovbaire (1992) posits that, political advertising presents a wonderful opportunity for politicians, advertising practitioners and public relations experts to direct the campaigns of candidates and parties on substantive issues which relate to the welfare of the people and the development of the nation, through the development of a manifesto, which serves as a campaign material, and such issues tackled in the manifesto include transportation, education, employment, provision of roads, potable water and healthcare.

McNair (2003) defines political advertising as “the purchase and use of media space, paid for at commercial rates, in order to transmit political messages to a mass audience” (p.97). On the basis of this definition, political advertising is a form of communication that supports a candidate for nomination through the use of pamphlets, billboards, fliers, bumper stickers, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the internet. In the present-day political sphere, every politician vying for an elective office spends a reasonable part of his campaign funds on advertisement. The candidates make themselves known to the electorate in their respective constituencies through advertising. It is also through political advertisement and other media activities that candidates present the programmes they intend to pursue when voted into power, to enable voters make informed voting decisions. Political advertising communicates to voters strong reasons why a particular candidate should be preferred over others. Political advertising is usually paid for and disseminated through newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and the new media, with intent to reach a very large audience.

In contemporary society, advertisers who target a large online advertising also known as Internet or web marketing is referred to as the promotion of products or services over the internet (Priyanka, 2012). It is an advertising posted on the web with the aim of marketing goods and services, ideas, persons, etc. to consumers. Online advertising include banner advertising, floating advertising, video advertising, expanding advertising and pop-up advertising that stimulate web users whenever they log on Internet home page.

Brahim (2016) states that “although online advertising is often seen by users as an infiltration on their privacy, it is a more comfortable, convenient and cost effective method of doing business. Moreover, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have become important conduits through which audience also disseminate their messages through the Internet which advertising messages could move back-and-forth from the marketer to the consumers eliciting product and service exchanges and patronage”(p.34).

Through Facebook and Twitter, many consumers generate content and share their views, ideas and opinions to members of their social networks. Through these networks, product and service information can easily go viral the moment a customer clicks an advertisement and makes a purchase of the product that captivated him. This viral message adds to the marketers’ online store traffic; and generates goodwill.

Online advertising ranges from text and contextual links in related materials to big videos, banners, audio advertising and websites. It can be explored through search engine result pages, social networking sites, video and movie services, blogs, chat rooms, websites,

advertising networks. Online advertising campaigns are strategic management of groups of advertising messages. The advertisements may be placed in different media at varied times. It informs a target audience (i.e voters) and the public about campaign messages sent out to win their votes.

The above political advertising messages from political parties and their candidates, had saturated the online space, on Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Websites, suggesting a drive to sway voters' voting pattern to political parties, in the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Online Political advertising has consistently served as a tool for marketing political parties and their candidates who seek for elective offices. Its aim was to use online political advertising to influence the outcome of the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. This has shifted the target of political communication, from news to advertising, and with this, voters can have more online political advertising exposure than conventional political news, which was obtainable in the past.

Considering the youthful demography that dominates the online space in Akwa Ibom State, political parties such as the Peoples Democratic Party, All Progressives Congress, Young Progressives Party, Young Democratic Party, and Abundant Nigeria Renewal Party and their candidates had designed political advertising messages in form of pictorial graphics, short videos, promotional interviews, and jingles, which were posted through online channels like Facebook, Websites, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs and Instagram with the intention of swaying voters during general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

The main aim of these political advertising messages posted through online channels was to elicit responses from potential voters' in Akwa Ibom State and their willingness to vote for a candidate based on convictions. Another aim of these messages was to ensure that, voters' who had more online political advertising exposure, would be opened to behavioural patterns of voting a particular candidate, based on perceived influence by the messages.

What has not been ascertained or determined is whether or not voters' behaviour was influenced through the use of online political advertising during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. The problem of the study is captured thus: To what extent was online political advertising responsible for voting patterns by electorate in Akwa Ibom State during general elections?

1.3 Research Questions

1. To what extent were voters exposed to online political advertising during general elections in Akwa Ibom State?
2. What were the predominant online platforms with political advertisements that appealed to voters during the general elections in Akwa Ibom State?
3. To what extent was exposure to online political advertising responsible for Voters' knowledge of Candidates and their policy statements?

1.4 Scope of the Study

The research is restricted to online political advertising and voters voting decision during general elections in Akwa Ibom State. The study covered period when the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) designated for campaigns, for all political parties during general elections in Akwa Ibom State. Only political parties which made use of online political advertising during general elections were considered in the research. These are the Peoples Democratic Party, All Progressives Congress, Young Progressives Party, Young Democratic Party, and Abundant Nigeria Renewal Party. The focus of the study was on the online channels such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, Websites, Whatsapp and Instagram used for online political advertising during general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Registered voters who participated in general elections in Akwa Ibom State, formed part of the study to determine the extent their voting patterns were influenced by online political advertising.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The study adopts the survey research design. The survey research design is the collection of information from a sample of individuals. The survey is also useful to researchers in gathering relevant data from a large audience to arrive at an objective conclusion. The design entails an examination of the attitudes, practices, beliefs, and opinions of a predetermined population on a given subject matter.

The population of the study will include all registered voters in Akwa Ibom State during the 2019 general elections who have an online presence. According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC 2018), the total number of registered voters in Akwa Ibom State is put at 2, 119,727. Therefore, the population of the study is 2, 119, 727 voters in the state. The sample size for the study will be 400. The figure was arrived at using the Taro Yamane formula for sample size determination.

In this research, the following sampling techniques will be used: (1). Purposive sampling technique, (2). Convenience sampling technique.

Two instruments will be used for data collection in this study. The instruments are the questionnaire and the interview schedule. The questionnaire will be designed using simple language for easy understanding and devoid of ambiguity.

The study made use of quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. The data collected from copies of the questionnaire were analysed using the weighted mean score and simple percentages in tabular presentations. In analysing data using the four-point Likert scale items in the questionnaire, responses to the items were graded as follows:

Strongly Agree (SA) – 4 Points

1.6 DATA PRESENTATION

Objective one: The extent Voters' in Akwa Ibom State were exposed to online political advertising during the 2019 general elections

Table 1: I had significant level of exposure to online political advertising during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Nature of response	Frequency	W(X)	FX	WMS	Decision
Strongly Agree	174	4	696		
Agree	108	3	324		
Disagree	84	2	168		
Strongly Disagree	33	1	33		
Total	400	10	1221	3.0	Accepted

Data in Table1 show respondents' significant level of exposure to online political advertising. This is attested to by an accepted response of 3.0.

Table 2 Online platforms respondents had profile on

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Facebook	167	41
Twitter	89	22
Websites	86	21
Instagram	23	5
YouTube	19	4
TikTok	16	7
Total	400	100

In Table 2, data show that Facebook was the online platform through which most respondents had profile on, in Akwa Ibom State. Websites, Whatsapp, TikTok, YouTube and Instagram had quite a few respondents who indicated they had profiles on those platforms.

Table 3: Amount of time respondents spent in online platforms daily

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Below 1hour	251	62
1-3Hours	98	24
3-5 Hours	33	8
5Hours and above	18	6
Total	400	100

In Table 3, data show that most respondents spent below one hour daily on online platforms in Akwa Ibom State. 3-5 hours and 5 hours and above had quite a few respondents who indicated they spent those times daily on online platforms frequently.

Table 4: Online platforms that availed respondents of political advertising messages during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Nature of response	Frequency	W(X)	FX	WMS	Decision
Strongly Agree	184	4	736		
Agree	101	3	303		
Disagree	82	2	164		
Strongly Disagree	33	1	33		
Total	400	10	1236		

Data in Table 4 point to the idea that online platforms availed respondents of political advertising messages during general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Data show that online platforms availed respondents of political advertising messages during general elections in Akwa Ibom State. This is attested to by an accepted response result of 3.0. Online platforms availed me of political advertising messages during general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 5: Political advertising messages dominated online platforms during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Nature of response	Frequency	W(X)	FX	WMS	Decision
Strongly Agree	109	4	436		
Agree	190	3	570		
Disagree	87	2	174		
Strongly Disagree	14	1	14		
Total	400	10	1194	2.98	Accepted

Data in Table 5 point to the fact that political advertising messages dominated online platforms during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Data show that political advertising messages dominated online platforms during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. This is attested to by an accepted response result of 2.98. Political advertising messages dominated online platforms during the general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 6: Responses to being exposed to political advertising messages frequently in online platforms

Nature of response	Frequency	W(X)	FX	WMS	Decision
Strongly Agree	96	4	384		
Agree	178	3	534		
Disagree	97	2	194		
Strongly Disagree	29	1	29		
Total	400	10	1141	2.85	Accepted

Data in Table 6 point to the fact that respondents were exposed to political advertising messages frequently in online platforms during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Data show the level of frequent exposure to political advertising messages in online platforms during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State by respondents. This is attested to by an accepted response result of 2.85.

Objective Two: Identify the predominant online platforms with political advertisements that appealed to voters during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 7: Which of these online platforms did you frequently visit during the 2019 general election campaigns?

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Website	81	20
Facebook	218	54
Twitter	57	14
Instagram	22	5
TikTok	0	0
Whatsapp	22	7
	400	100

In Table 7, data show that Facebook was the platform through which most respondents were exposed to online political advertising in Akwa Ibom State.

Twitter, Whatsapp, TikTok and Instagram had quite a few respondents who indicated they visited those platforms frequently during general election campaigns.

Table 8: Online platforms Respondents spent the most time viewing political advertising campaign messages during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Website	89	22
Facebook	178	44
Twitter	59	14
Instagram	40	10
Tiktok	5	1
Whatsapp	29	9
Total	400	100

In Table 8, data show that Facebook was the platform through which most respondents spent the most time viewing online political advertising messages during general elections in Akwa Ibom State and websites were the second online platform respondents also spent the most time viewing.

Twitter, Whatsapp, TikTok and Instagram had quite a few respondents who indicated they had spent the most time viewing online political advertising messages during general elections

Table 9: Political advertisements in online platforms that appealed to respondents during the 2019 general elections

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Animations	40	10
Videos	176	44
Pictorials	164	41
Contextual Link	9	2
Texts	11	3
Total	400	100

In Table 9, data show that videos were political advertisements in online platforms that appealed to Voters' during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. The next in line were pictorials.

Animations, contextual links and texts had quite a few respondents who indicated those political advertisements in online platforms had appealed to them.

Table 10: Online platforms political parties advertised the most persuasive messages

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Websites	50	13
Whatsapp	39	9
Facebook	176	44
Twitter	94	23
Tiktok	2	0.5
Instagram	36	11
Total	400	100

In Table 10, data show that Facebook was the platform through which political parties had advertised the most persuasive messages. The next in line was Twitter.

Websites, YouTube, Whatsapp, TikTok and Instagram had quite a few respondents who indicated those platforms as one with most persuasive messages advertised by political parties.

Objective 3: Voters’ knowledge of Candidates and their policy statements through exposure to online political advertising.

Table 11: Platforms through which respondents were exposed to online political advertising in Akwa Ibom State.

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Facebook	213	53
Youtube	21	5
Instagram	14	3
Twitter	89	22
Websites	63	17
Total	400	100

In Table 11, data show that Facebook was the platform through which most respondents were exposed to online political advertising in Akwa Ibom State. Websites, YouTube and Instagram had quite a few respondents who indicated those platforms as sources of exposure to online political advertisements.

Table 12: Feedback on exposure to political advertising through online platforms during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Options	Frequency	Percentages
----------------	------------------	--------------------

Facebook	86	21
Twitter	149	37
YouTube	67	16
Websites	56	14
Instagram	42	12
Total	400	100

In Table 12, data show that Twitter was the platform through which most respondents were exposed to online political advertising in Akwa Ibom State. Websites, YouTube and Instagram had quite a few respondents who indicated those platforms as sources of exposure to online political advertisements.

Table 13: Respondents knowledge of candidates through exposure to political advertising through online platforms.

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Facebook	261	65
Twitter	65	16
YouTube	02	0.5
Websites	38	9
Instagram	8	2
Tiktok	1	0.25
Whatsapp	25	8
Total	400	100

Data in Table 13, data show that Facebook was the platform through which most respondents had knowledge of candidates of political parties. The next in line was Twitter.

Websites, YouTube, TikTok, Whatsapp and Instagram had quite a few respondents who indicated those platforms as sources where they had knowledge of candidates of political parties.

Table 14: Respondents knowledge of online political advertising campaign messages and policy statements during the 2019 general elections

Nature of response	Frequency	W(X)	FX	WMS	Decision
Strongly Agree	10	4	400		
Agree	211	3	633		
Disagree	80	2	160		
Strongly Disagree	09	1	9		
Total	400	10	1202	3.0	Accepted

Data in Table 14, point to the fact that respondents got knowledge of campaign messages and policy statements of political parties during general elections through online political advertising.

Data show that knowledge of political campaign messages and policy statements of political parties were gotten through online political advertising during general elections? This is attested to by an accepted response result of 3.0. Knowledge of political campaign messages and policy statements of political parties were gotten through online advertising during general elections.

Table 15: Exposure to online political advertising that led to knowledge of candidates and their political parties

Nature of response	Frequency	W(X)	FX	WMS	Decision
Strongly Agree	309	4	1236		
Agree	78	3	234		
Disagree	10	2	20		
Strongly Disagree	03	1	3		
Total	400	10	1493	3.59	Accepted

Data in Table 15 point to the idea that respondents' knowledge of candidates and their political parties were mostly from exposure to online political advertising.

Data show that knowledge of candidates and their political parties were mostly from exposure to online political advertising during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. This is attested to by an accepted response result of 3.59. Knowledge of candidates and their political parties were mostly from exposure to online political advertising.

1.7 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question one: To what extent were Voters' exposed to online political advertising during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State?

The study found out the extent voters' were exposed to online political advertising during general elections in Akwa Ibom State, based on the quantitative data obtained from 400 respondents, designated for the research. The result of the data showed an acceptable response, that voters had far reaching exposure to online political advertising and their decisions were based on the level of exposure seen in the data above.

Therefore, the answer to research question one, to what extent were voters' in Akwa Ibom State exposed to online political advertising and their decisions during general elections is that, majority of the respondents were exposed to online political advertising messages, which had contributed to their decisions in making a choice of candidates.

This finding aligns with McLuhan's technological determinism theory, which establishes the idea that technology has the ability to drive human interaction and create social change, as we have

seen in the responses from respondents, which technology has played a role in creating the needed effect and social change, to drive voters' choices on who to vote.

Research question two: What were the predominant online platforms with political advertisements that appealed to voters during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State?

In answering the research question above, the Researcher was able to identify predominant online platforms with political advertising messages that appealed to voters during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

Therefore, the answer to research question two, what were the predominant online platforms with political advertisements that appealed to voters during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State, was that, Facebook, Twitter, Websites, Whatsapp and Instagram were predominant online platforms with political advertising messages that had appealed to Voters during general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

The findings of this study also aligns with Adler (2006) who averred that technological determinism holds the idea that technology has important effects on our lives. It further stated that, the idea figures prominently in the popular imagination and political rhetoric, for example in the idea that the Internet is revolutionizing economy and society.

Research question three: To what extent was exposure to online political advertising responsible for Voters' knowledge of Candidates and their policy statements?

In response to research question 3, the respondents' response point to the extent, exposure to online political advertising was responsible for voters' knowledge of candidates and their policy statements during general elections in Akwa Ibom State, with data from 400 respondents sampled in the study.

Therefore, the answer to research question three, to what extent was exposure to online political advertising responsible for Voters' knowledge of Candidates and their policy statements, was that, respondents had a far reaching exposure to online political advertising through online platforms, with Facebook, being the most predominant platform that offered the most exposure to respondents during general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

It is worthy to note that, the findings is relevant to the study of O'Cass (2001) which uses an exchange model to define political marketing. During elections, when voters cast their votes, a transaction takes place. In exchange for their votes, the political candidate offers better government and policies after election. This way, marketing can be applied to political processes as it is specifically interested in how these transactions are created.

1.8 CONCLUSION

Relying on the findings of the study, it was concluded that, online political advertising had played a major role in voters' voting decisions in Akwa Ibom State. It was also found that, online political advertising can be used to help voters gain exposure to policy statements of candidates and their political parties. Political parties had also admitted to the use of online political advertising to reach out to voters in Akwa Ibom State, which had also served as a vehicle of marketing their policy statements and candidates to the electorate. Online platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Whatsapp, Websites and YouTube, had served as veritable tools to propagate political advertising messages from political parties and its candidates.

The study concluded that voters had expressed their satisfaction in the exposure to online political advertising experienced from different political parties during general elections in Akwa Ibom State. It was concluded that, harnessing online political advertising to influence voters' voting decisions during general elections in Akwa Ibom State, can improve the political space, and give the online audience a sense of belonging, in campaign promotions.

The awareness and usage of online platforms in projecting political messages, further presents an opportunity for youth employment through advertisement, and holding political parties and its candidates accountable, through documentation of advertised policies.

1.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher made the under-listed recommendations:

1. Voters' education should be intensified by political parties and candidates, to enable voters gain more exposure to online political advertising.
2. Political parties should channel resources to online political advertising practitioners through engagement of more online platforms and not a selective predominant platform to reach a wider targeted audience.
3. Voters' should get involved in checkmating policy statements of political parties, as a high level of exposure to online political advertising could help them.

REFERENCES

- Adler, P (2006). Technological Determinism. In Clegg, S., & Bailey J. R (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Organization Studies*
- Brahim, S (2016). The impact of Online Advertising on Tunisian Consumers' Purchase Intention. *Journal of Marketing Research and Case Studies*, 73 -74.
- McNair, B (2003). *An Introduction to Political Communication*. London: Psychology Press
- O'Cass, A (2001). *Political marketing: An investigation of the political marketing concept and political market orientation*. Queensland: Griffith University
- Oyovbaire, S (1992). *Political Developments in Nigeria: A Review Essay*. Benin: University Press.
- Priyanka, S (2012). *A Study on Impact of Online Advertising on Consumer Behaviour*. <http://www.semanticscholar.org>, retrieved: November 12, 2022.