

INFLUENCE OF BILLBOARD ADVERTISEMENTS ON THE CHOICE OF CANDIDATES IN THE 2023 ELECTIONS: A STUDY OF ETSAKO WEST VOTERS

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Abstract

This study focuses on the influence of billboard advertisements on the choice of candidates in the 2023 elections: A study of Etsako West voters. It was carried out to ascertain how billboards influence voters' choice of candidates during elections, and it focused on the 2023 general election in Nigeria. The respondents were taken from Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. Survey research design was adopted using well-structured questionnaires for the study. The study was anchored on Expectancy Theory. The data for this study were collected from voters in Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. The data were presented, analyzed, and interpreted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 23). The study found that billboard advertisements contribute to the awareness of candidates who contested in the elections but had limited influence on voters' choice of candidates. The study recommended that politicians and their parties should continue to use billboards for elections since they contribute to the public awareness of candidates contesting elections. The research further suggested that politicians and their parties should explore alternative campaign strategies, as billboards were found to have had minimal influence on voters' choice of candidates.

Keywords: Influence, Billboard Advertisement, Choice of Candidates.

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Introduction

In Nigeria, billboard advertisements have become a common sight during political campaigns, and their influence on voters' choice of candidates cannot be understated. Billboards were a major political campaign tool that influenced voters' choice of candidates in the run-up to Nigeria's general elections in 2023 (Smith, 2023). According to Kelechi (2019), political billboards play a crucial role in election campaigns all around the world, including Nigeria. These enormous portraits of politicians, along with catchphrases and messages, are displayed in prominent spots such as public squares, marketplaces, and main roads.

Billboard political advertising is one of the most

powerful means of influencing public opinion and, eventually, voters' decisions. Because of the visibility of billboard advertisements and thoughtful placement of the adverts in busy places, billboards provide politicians with platforms to spread their political views to a wide range of audience. They work well to promote a candidate's image, increase name recognition, and communicate clear policy stances. Historically, billboard advertisements have been quite important during political campaigns in Nigeria. Due to the country's wide geographical distribution and varied demographic makeup, billboards are useful tools for connecting voters together from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, languages, and geographic areas (Onifade, 2015). Additionally,

billboards may visually communicate ideas in a fashion that is widely understood in places where access to digital media is restricted or where literacy rates may be low.

During the general elections of 2023, Etsako West, like many other local governments in Edo State, saw an increase in billboard advertisements. The visual attractiveness of billboards is one of their most enticing features. These commercials' combination of color, imagery, and typography frequently elicits strong emotional reactions in viewers, which aids in forging a bond with them. Using pictures of themselves mingling with common people, showing national symbols, or equating themselves with popular culture references that struck a chord with Nigerians, political contenders in the 2023 election took advantage of this (Johnson, 2023). These components played a crucial role in forming public impression of candidates by fostering ideas of their competence, reliability, and credibility. The billboards' textual content was also very important. Candidates effectively encapsulated their political views, pledges, and campaign themes in short, memorable slogans (Williams, 2020). Voters were able to form strong connections between the candidates and their suggested policies by frequently viewing these phrases.

The purpose of strategically placing billboards is to draw public attention to the candidates. Voter familiarity and recognition are greatly increased by the frequent exposure to a candidate's message, picture, or party symbol on these billboards (Kam & Zechmeister, 2013). Voters may grow to trust and believe these billboards when they see them on a regular basis. To promote their political candidates and make them acceptable to voters, a number of political billboards of different parties are often erected in Auchi, the headquarters of the Etsako West local government area.

In order to elicit strong emotional reactions from viewers, effective billboard commercials frequently use convincing visual design and succinct text (Brown & Johnson, 2021). They could draw on regional problems, cultural icons, or motivational stories. Voters may make decisions depending on the feelings sparked by the billboards as a result of this emotional resonance (Williams, 2020). Other campaign tactics including town hall meetings, rallies, and door-to-door outreach are enhanced by billboard advertisements (Jones, 2021).

For many areas, voters' decisions about the political candidates to support are greatly influenced by billboard advertisements (Banducci, 2017). Their influence is derived from a variety of factors, including their exposure, emotional effect, localized targeting, synergy with other campaigns, and legitimacy-conveying abilities. Although billboards are only one

component of a larger campaign plan, their placement may have a big influence on the outcome of the election. For politicians hoping to win election, it is essential to comprehend the nature of billboard advertising in a particular local setting as campaign dynamics change. In light of the aforementioned, this study investigates how voters' choices of candidates in Etsako West, Edo State, are influenced by billboard advertisements.

Statement of the Problem

The disparity in funding between political parties and candidates is one important issue. The ability to place billboards in strategic places determine the extent to which politicians and parties could obscure the messages of the less funded parties which consequently have aggravated Nigeria's money politics problem where a candidate's wealth and policy ideas can be eclipsed by more funded parties.

Furthermore, billboards provide a one-way channel of communication, which keeps politicians from having in-depth conversations with voters. With no ability to clarify, raise questions, or have meaningful conversations with candidates, voters are only passive consumers of communications. This disengagement may make it more difficult to make wise decisions. Though several studies, such as those by Zulu (2019) and Ghaiath et al. (2022), have been carried out to determine the impact of billboard advertisements on voters' political decisions, none of them have successfully investigated the impact of billboard advertisements on voters' choice of candidates in the Etsako West local government area of Edo State. This study attempts to close this gap. Therefore, the problem necessitating this study is 'what is the influence of billboard advertisements on voters' choice of candidates in Etsako West, Edo State?'

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- i. Assess the extent to which political billboards contribute to voters' awareness of candidates in the 2023 general elections.
- ii. Examine the influence of billboard advertisements on voters' choice of political candidates in Etsako West Local Government Area.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated based on the objectives of this study:

- i. To what extent did political billboards contribute to voters' awareness of candidates in the 2023 Election?
- ii. What is the influence of billboard

advertisements on voters' choice of political candidates in Etsako West local government area?

Review of Related Literature

Role of Billboards in Political Advertising

As a type of outdoor media, billboards are usually intended to draw in attention from traffic, pedestrians, and people. They frequently have eye-catching imagery, models, and slogans (Edegoh et al., 2013). One of the most important aspects of human connection is communication, which is important in many areas, including politics. The term "political communication" refers to a wide range of activities including political players, institutions, the media, and, most crucially, the general public in the communication process (Christian, 2016).

As media tools, billboards are seen as an essential component of political advertising. A political advertisement on a billboard will stand out due to its static character, which allows the message to stay in place for a longer amount of time and raise awareness because commuters and bystanders will see it more often (Hobbs, 2020). Hobbs pointed out that studies have looked into the use of billboards and other forms of outdoor advertising as a political weapon to encourage voters to support a certain individual in an election. For example, outdoor advertising such as billboards and other kinds of advertising expose people to promoted material the most (GeoPoll, 2019). In the field of politics, people have a propensity to pay attention to and take in a political billboard's content before moving on.

A particular type of outdoor media called billboards is used to draw attention from onlookers, cars, and pedestrians. Typically, they have eye-catching models, attention-grabbing pictures, and memorable phrases (Edegoh, et al, 2013). Furthermore, two common definitions of billboards are provided by Duncan (2013), cited by Edegoh et al. (2013): first, they are outdoor signs or posters that are frequently seen along freeways, highways, and streets; second, they can also refer to sponsor announcements that are made at the beginning, middle, or end of a radio or television transmission. Asemah (2011) also emphasizes the importance of billboards as an outdoor advertising medium in political advertising.

Within the larger subject of business and human communication, political advertisement is a specialist field (Ezegwu et al., 2015). Political communication is a subset of social advertisement, which is a subset of social marketing, according to Asemah and Edegoh (2012). Asemah and Edegoh (2012) point out that political campaigns contain actions meant to garner votes, which is a type of political

salesmanship, citing Gana (1992). These actions include a range of initiatives aimed at promoting a political party, organization, philosophy, or candidate. **Influence of Billboard on Voters' Choice of Political Candidates**

The constant pursuit of voter outreach and persuasion has long been a hallmark of political campaigns (Smith and Anderson, 2018). Conventional marketing techniques still work in this digital age of networking sites and online advertising dominance (Jones, 2020). In the political sphere, billboard advertising in particular has a special role as a potent tool for delivering issues to voters (Brown, 2017).

Human psychology plays a major role in how voters' decisions are influenced by billboards. When people see billboard advertisement, a number of psychological concepts are at work. First of all, billboards draw attention due to their height; they frequently stand tall at busy junctions and highways (Johnson, 2019). Because of their striking visual presence, billboards are hard to overlook. In politics, where politicians want to leave a lasting impression, the capacity to draw in and maintain attention is essential (Adams, 2021).

Furthermore, billboards employ images and succinct language that emotionally connect with voters (Davis, 2018). In order to elicit feelings and connections, effective billboards frequently rely on captivating images, color schemes, and typography (Smith, 2020). Voters are drawn to a candidate's image and principles when they view a billboard in addition to information and figures. Their decisions may be greatly influenced by this emotional bond (Jones, 2021).

The deliberate placement of billboards in busy places increases their impact on voters (Johnson, 2021). In order to target certain demographics and geographic areas, candidates and political parties deliberately choose sites that enhance visibility (Smith, 2020). For example, billboards near rural highways may target a different audience than those in metropolitan areas, which reach a more diversified and frequently younger audience (Brown, 2020). By using this regional targeting, politicians may be guaranteed to contact the voters who have the greatest inclination to endorse them.

Voters' selections of political candidates are greatly influenced by billboard advertising (Smith, 2020). Billboards reinforce politicians' identities and messages by appealing to human psychology and utilizing the power of images and emotion to leave a lasting impression (Johnson, 2021). According to Brown (2017), billboards are effective means of contacting voters because of their deliberate placement in high-traffic regions and continuous

public visibility. But there are practical and ethical issues, just as with other media (Adams, 2017). Billboard advertising's effects should be considered in the context of larger campaign tactics, and laws must guarantee fair competition for all contenders (Jones, 2021). Ultimately, political advertising, including billboards, plays a crucial role in the democratic process by assisting politicians in presenting their platforms to the general public (Davis, 2018). On their part, voters need to evaluate the material they come across attentively and make wise selections while acknowledging the potential impact of billboard advertising.

Theoretical Framework

This research work is anchored on Expectancy Theory.

Expectancy Theory

Expectancy theory, developed by Victor H. Vroom in 1964, is a prominent motivational theory that seeks to explain why individuals choose to engage in certain behaviors over others (Vroom et al., 2015). At its core, expectancy theory posits that people are motivated to act in a particular way based on their beliefs about the likelihood of their actions leading to desired outcomes (Shang et al., 2023). In essence, individuals weigh the effort they put into a task against the expected outcome and the value they place on that outcome.

According to Amir et al (2023), the theory is based on three key concepts: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence.

Expectancy: Expectancy refers to an individual's belief about the likelihood that their efforts will lead to successful performance. In other words, it is the perceived probability that exerting effort will result in the desired level of performance. This expectancy is influenced by factors such as a person's skills, knowledge, past experiences, and the availability of necessary resources.

Instrumentality: Instrumentality refers to the belief that successful performance will result in certain outcomes or rewards. It is the perception of the relationship between performance and outcomes. Individuals assess whether achieving a certain level of performance will actually lead to the desired outcome, such as a promotion, recognition, or financial reward. For instance, if an employee believes that performing well on their job will lead to a salary increase or a bonus, they are more likely to be motivated to excel.

Valence: Valence refers to the value or attractiveness that an individual places on the outcomes or rewards associated with a particular behavior. It represents the subjective importance or desirability of the outcomes. Different individuals may have different valences for the same outcome based on their personal preferences, needs, and goals. For example, while some employees

may highly value monetary rewards, others may prioritize opportunities for career advancement or work-life balance.

Expectancy theory suggests that motivation is highest when individuals believe that: Their efforts will result in successful performance (high expectancy), Successful performance will lead to desired outcomes or rewards (high instrumentality) and the desired outcomes or rewards are personally meaningful and attractive (positive valence) (Subrahmanyam & Henari, 2023).

Moreover, according to expectancy theory, individuals are rational decision-makers who choose behaviors that maximize the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes while minimizing effort. Therefore, they are likely to allocate their efforts towards tasks where they believe they have a high expectancy of success and where the outcomes are highly valued (Kugler et al., 2012).

In the context of the influence of billboard advertisements on the choice of candidates in the 2023 elections in Etsako West, Nigeria, expectancy theory provide valuable insights into how voters perceive and respond to political advertising. In the 2023 elections, billboard advertisements play a significant role in shaping voter perceptions and preferences. These advertisements serve as a visible and ubiquitous form of communication, reaching a wide audience and influencing public opinion. Voters were exposed to messages, images, and slogans that were designed to create positive associations with particular candidates and their platforms. Through expectancy theory, we can understand how voters interpret these advertisements and make decisions based on their expectations of the outcomes.

Research Methodology

A survey research method was adopted for this study. The survey was conducted in Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria, focusing on voters of 18 villages across the six clans in Etsako West Local Government Area selected through the multi stage sampling technique. The population consisted of voters from Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State, with a total of 158,899. The sample size for this study was 400, determined by using Taro Yamane's sample size formula.

The questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. Data were collected through primary data collection approach. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents on a one-on-one basis using trained research assistants. The data collected was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) to obtain frequencies, percentages, and statistical measurements.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Analysis of Questionnaire Distribution

Number of Questionnaire Distributed	400
Number of Questionnaire Returned and analyzable	396
Number of Copies not returned	4
Percentage of Questionnaire Returned	99%

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 indicates that out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 396 were returned and deemed analyzable. This results in a 99% return rate which is an excellent response rate. Additionally, four questionnaires were not returned.

Table 2: To what extent did political billboards contribute to your awareness of candidates during the 2023 Election?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very large extent	233	58.8	58.8	58.8
Large extent	108	27.3	27.3	86.1
Not sure	7	1.8	1.8	87.9
Some extent	36	9.1	9.1	97.0
Not at all	12	3.0	3.0	100.0
Total	396	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2024

From the data in table 2, it can be inferred that a significant portion of the respondents found political billboards to have contributed to their awareness of candidates during the 2023 elections, with 233 respondents (58.8%) indicating a very large extent and 108 (27.3%) respondents indicating a large extent. There are also 7 respondents, representing 1.8%, who were unsure. Respondents who felt that political billboards contributed to their awareness of candidates to some extent were 36, representing 9.1%, while a smaller number of 12 respondents, representing 3%, indicated that political billboards did not contribute to their awareness of candidates at all.

Table 3: Did the billboard advertisements influence your choice of candidate during the 2023 election?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Very much	29	7.3	7.3	7.3
Much	40	10.1	10.1	17.4
Not sure	60	15.2	15.2	32.6
Not much	113	28.5	28.5	61.1
Not at all	154	38.9	38.9	100.0
Total	396	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2024

This table 3 shows that the majority of the respondents felt that billboard advertisements had limited or no influence on their decision-making process regarding candidate selection during the 2023 election, as indicated by 113 (28.5%) and 154 (38%) respondents, respectively. 60 respondents, indicating 15.2%, were not sure of their stand. However, 29 respondents, representing 7.3%, and 40 respondents, representing 10.1%, indicate that the billboard had very much and much influence on their choice of candidates during the 2023 elections, respectively.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1:

To what extent did political billboards contribute to voters' awareness of candidates in the 2023 Election?

In research question one, the finding reveals that billboard contributed to the awareness of candidates during the 2023 election. This finding is contained in table 2 where the highest number of the respondents affirmed that political billboards contributed to their awareness of candidates during the 2023 elections, with 233 respondents (58.8%) indicating a very large extent and 108 (27.3%) respondents indicating a large extent. This indicates that billboard do contribute to the awareness of candidates during elections.

This finding is in line with Johnson (2019) assertion that when people see billboard advertisement, a number of psychological concepts are at work. First of all, billboards draw attention due to their height; they frequently stand tall at busy junctions and highways. Because of their striking visual presence, according to Adams (2021), billboards are hard to overlook. He notes this this ability to capture and hold attention is crucial in politics, where candidates aim to create lasting impressions.

This finding is further reinforced by Adams (2017) in his statement that repetition is a cornerstone of advertising because it helps consumers remember a brand or message. This indicates that in the context of politics, people who often see a candidate's face, name, and main message on billboards during their daily routines are more likely to absorb and remember it (Davis, 2018). Keller (1993) also noted that a common technique for promoting brand recognition is the billboard. They serve as visual signals to help people identify a product or brand. Good billboards, according to Mirny (2023) improve memory recall, which leaves a lasting impression.

Research Question 2:

What is the influence of billboard advertisements on voters' choice of political candidates in Etsako West local government area?

In research question two, it was the finding of this study that billboard has limited influence on voters' choice of political candidates in Etsako West Local Government Area. Table 3 provides the answer to this research question as it shows that the majority of the respondents felt that billboard advertisements had limited or no influence on their decision-making process regarding candidate selection during the 2023 election, as indicated by 113 (28.5%) and 154 (38%) respondents, respectively.

This finding is in line with Chioma et al (2015) statement that political advertising, as a tool for political communication, has a positive effect on certain Nigerian voters, it is not however the main factor, as voters tend to base their decisions more on the political party and the candidate's ethnicity. This point is further enhanced by Cohen (2021) who noted that there are other factors that influence voters' choice of candidates more than billboard as human being is a complex political animal that put many things into consideration before deciding on a candidate to support. It is also consistent with study conducted by Martins and Werna (2017), which discovered that media contents are powerless to influence readers or shape public opinion. They contend that a variety of intricate and conditional media impacts exist, depending on individual circumstances and predispositions. People usually have strong opinions, thus they are prone to reject or ignore information that goes against their ideas. A multitude of elements, including emotional responses, insecurity, media reliance, and personal beliefs and ideals that align with media content, can impact an individual.

This finding however contradicts the stand of Iyenga and Simon (2020) who argued that political media advertisements significantly influenced voter behavior. The finding was also contrary to the postulation of Side et al. (2024) who said that billboards have the ability to garner support for a political candidate and influence voters' decisions during elections.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that billboard advertisements creates awareness of political candidates seeking elective positions but has minimal influence of the choice of candidates by voters. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

i. Given the substantial impact of billboards on candidate awareness, it is recommended that political campaigns continue to utilize billboards as a primary

means of reaching voters.

ii. While billboards may not be the primary factor influencing voter decisions, they still serve as important tools for candidate visibility. It is recommended that political campaigns diversify their communication strategies to include a combination of mediums, such as social media, community engagements, and traditional media, to effectively reach and persuade voters.

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