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Voters' Evaluation of Billboard Advertising Influence on 2023 Electoral Mobilisation in Delta State, Nigeria

Author(s)

Oluwatobi Enitan Modeyin

Department of Mass Communication, Glorious Vision University, Ogwa-Nigeria

Aruna Mohammed

Department of Mass Communication, Glorious Vision University, Ogwa-Nigeria

Kelvin Inobemhe

Department of Mass Communication, Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State, Nigeria

Abstract

Political advertising especially outdoor types have since assumed prominent places in advertising plan during campaigns. However, there is a sharp division among researchers on the influence of these important advertising tools in our contemporary world. Therefore, the study was conducted to ascertain the role of billboard advertising in mobilising electorate during the 2023 general elections in Delta State. The study adopted the survey research method. A sample of 400 was taken from the population of 3,221,697 voters in the state and the researchers relied on questionnaire as instruments of data collection. The study saw a 97 percent response rate with the analysis based on 386 respondents' perceptions. Research findings revealed that there was massive use of billboard during the 2023 general elections in Delta State. It also revealed that the voters were exposed to billboard as a tool for political advert. Part of the findings of the study was that certain appeals were embedded in the political advertising to which the electorates were exposed with youth appeal being the most prominent. The researchers found that the exposure of electorate in Delta to billboard advertising did not influence their choice of candidates during the elections. The study concludes that billboard are important aspects of tools for 21st century political advertising but are not as powerful as assumed especially in respect of influence on voter behaviour and electoral decision during elections. The study, among others, recommends that there is the need to keep improving billboard advert to further make it a viable tool for political advertising in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Advertising, Billboard, Electorate, Mobilisation, Politics*

Introduction

Advertising has in recent times grown into a popular tool for campaign; an index for politics and business and one that is recognised in different professional practice. It has become the centerpiece of marketing in modern times and major force in campaign and promotion efforts. According to Asemah (2011), persuasion is the central interest of advertising as readers, listeners or viewers (audience) are targeted with messages to propel them to take favourable action in respect of product and services or even ideas. Furthermore, the researcher noted that ideological, political or commercial advertising are all geared toward influencing the consumer behaviour to act positively toward a brand that could be political or otherwise. This implies that advertising is intentional.

It is noteworthy that advertising is mainly about exploring persuasion to influence the audience to take action that favours an idea, product or service (Elijah & Aer, 2017). The foregoing implies that the primary target and goal of advertising is that there is the long

term audience appreciation of products and services no matter their initial perception. Quoting Abidem and Saleem (2011), the researchers also noted that the quest to reach the prospective customer is the main goal of the advertiser who often also aims to influence their attitudes and behaviours towards the products and services. Therefore, it is perceived as a crucial persuasion source and helps in the bid to attract and maintain the attention of the prospective customers towards acceptance of a particular idea or product.

Mainstream advertising births political advertising – as the latter is seen as an aspect of the former (Tejumaiye et al., 2018) and since Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999, the concept has continued to gain popularity in both academic and public discourse. As a matter of fact, the use of political advertising in the Nigerian political landscape is a trend and its popularity continue to soar among academics and politicians (Chioma et al., 2015). This implies that it is continuously being explored as a tool of political marketing and this has continued to remain relevant even in the face of rapid technological advancements impacting all types of media practice including advertising.

Political parties have made it a point of duty to source the services of agencies in the creative industry to help package persuasive messages towards "wooing" and "convincing" the electorate through different media tools such as fliers, pamphlets, stickers, bumper, newspaper, magazines, billboards, radio, and television (Chioma et al., 2015). Political advertising offers political institutions especially parties and their candidates the latitude as well as the chance to engage and persuade the electorate towards taking voting decisions (Eseh & Umanah, 2019). This also aligns with the notion that candidates in an election and politicians in each generation have always had a grasp of the powers of the media and tap into same for effective communication with the electorate electioneering campaigns (Emruli & Baca, 2011, as cited in Santas & Ezeanoikwa, 2017).

According to Asemah (2011), the philosophy behind the use of billboard is not about the desire to make a town look beautiful but about the need to attract and maintain public's attention to a particular product or service rendered by the advertisers. In Nigeria, recent political campaigns have mainly been about billboard advertising. Despite the growth, including knowledge, and growing popularity of the electronic media in the nation, billboard has continued to gained prominence as tools for political campaigns. Aside birthing many agencies that are inclusively into billboard advertising, this development has also given birth to an association that serve as umbrella body of Nigerian agencies concerned with billboard advertising and also known by the public to

be a subsidiary of the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) (Bardi, 2010).

That there is a continuous rise in the use billboard advertising for promotion of projects among Nigerians is a testament of the effectiveness of the tools in the advertising industry (Ajo, 2006). In contrast to other types of outdoor advertising tools, billboard ensures that the audience or people are repeatedly and frequently exposed to the advertisement. High human and vehicular traffic is often a consideration when siting a billboard; a decision that also puts persons who makes use of such busy areas in position of being perpetually exposed to advertisement in the board – just as much as a high degree of locational flexibility is offered to the customer (Wroblewski, 2018).

In recent times, political advertising in Nigeria has gained prominence and recognition chiefly because of the consciousness on the part of political parties and their representatives at different levels (candidates) – as their consciousness as to the perceived usefulness and potency of the tool as a means to create awareness and educate people of their manifestos grew (Ojekwe, 2016). Quoting Olujide (2010), Ojekwe noted that within the political sphere of country, advertising is currently perceived as a veritable channel or tool either market or de-market a candidate and perceived opponents (as the case may be). Put differently, political candidates and their parties are able to use political advertising to create a favourable self-image, and at the same time ensure that their opponent is seen from a negative-image perspective.

Political advertising is central to that of billboard because the former is the umbrella term used for all activities geared towards making a political candidate, party, and ideology known and appealing to the electorate in Nigeria and elsewhere across the world. Its growing demand, however transverses different election periods in Nigeria (Nwachukwu, 2023). A look at successive elections in the country – say 1999 elections to even the recent one in 2023 shows that political parties and their candidates utilised billboard advertising as tools to reach voters with the ultimate goal being to garner support through votes. However, academic debates relating to billboard efficacy in political advertising continue with great intensity drawing attentions of different players from diverse industries. Research efforts by different scholars have yielded results that suggest usefulness and effectiveness of billboards in awareness creation and political advertising (Ezegwu et al., 2015; Ezegwu & Mbonu, 2013).

Previous studies revealed that billboard is a useful tool that politicians or political candidates adopt to announce themselves to the electorate. A study conducted Ata-Awaji & Momoh (2020) with focus on advertising and elections revealed that in the real sense

of it, political advertising play a tiny role in elections. However, the 2023 general elections in Nigeria saw the use of billboard as a tool for political advertising was maintained by political parties and politicians as several were erected in strategic locations in towns and cities across Nigeria. Consequent upon the foregoing, therefore, this study is an evaluation of billboard advertising as channels for voter mobilisation during the general election in Delta State in the southernmost part of the country.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigerian politics, the use of political advertising has grown into a significant order (Tejumaiye et al., 2018). This has recently been tried and tested in previous elections in the country (such as the ones conducted in 2011, 2015, and 2019. In the 2023 election, major political parties and contenders (All Progressives' Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and other political parties) leveraged on available, effective, and affordable political advertising platforms. In the midst of several other media forms, billboard advertising happened to stand out as major point of information dissemination for political parties (Inobemhe et al., 2022). Magazines, newspapers, TV and radio as well as the Internet and many other outdoor categories including transportation were also explored as tools for ads. This is considered to have a correlation with the general understanding of political advertising and the impact on voters' behaviour during elections.

Politicians and political party have realised the importance and taken advantage of the abundant opportunities available in the area – including the new media and social platforms. In reaction, Nigerian scholars have identified political advertising as a recognisable influencer of voters in Nigeria (Ekharefo & Akoseogasimhe, 2017; Olujide et al., 2011). However, the main focus for this study is to determine the extent to which political advertising (in form of billboards) influenced the voting decisions of voters in Nigeria with specific focus on the ones in Delta state. As an important aspect of communication research, billboard advertising in particular, and political advertising in general has received wide attention of scholars (Chioma, 2015; Ojekwe, 2016; Olalekan & Sam, 2018; Udeze & Akpan, 2013).

However, in line with the 1999 constitution of the country, Nigeria conducted election once in a four-year period. In the same vein, communication evolves. Hence, the increase need for constant research in communication science and other areas of communication. This also validates the need for a periodic and extensive research in the sub-field of research. Therefore, this study sought to evaluate the influence of billboard advertising in the awareness creation and mobilisation of the voters during the 2023 general

elections in Delta State. The enquiry is from the perspective of the voters in the state. It was conducted with the intention to create a vivid description of variables and also to build more understanding of the research area. This is also imperative to shed light on certain research gaps that exist and needs to be filled.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

1. What is the level of utilisation of billboards as tools for political advertising in Delta State during the 2023 general elections?
2. What appeals were embedded in the billboard advertisement used during the electioneering campaigns?
3. What was the level of influence of billboard advertisement on voter's voting behaviour in the election?

Conceptual Review

Advertising

In order to have a good understanding of the use of billboards and the idea behind the entire concept, it is imperative to take a look at advertising and its associated concepts and sub-sets. Advertising is one unique aspect of external marketing (Bochkareva & Petrova, 2010). Fill (2005) lends credence that advertising is a powerful tool – be it on the basis of direct, local, national or international – and it is so described because it can influence audiences. Fill further asserts that the foregoing is achieved "by informing or reminding them of the existence of the brand, or alternatively by persuading them or helping to differentiate a product or organisation from others in the market" (p. 508).

Advertising can be seen as a marketing communication tool that makes attempt to influence the opinions or behaviour of potentials users of the advertised product or service (Hopper, 2020). In a further analysis, Hopper further posits that though an action is anticipated of the audience of a piece of advertisement, it is more of a one one-way message geared toward promoting a brand, organisation, idea or a service. Again, the choice of media to use to get the message across rests on the advertiser. However, such consideration is also a product of the nature of the message as well as the target audience (Bishnoi & Sharma, 2009). In other words, advertising does not stop at the door step of the organisation – just as the decision on the type of media to use is dependent on the nature of message, the target audience to whom the message is expected to be delivered, and the action anticipated.

Billboard Advertising

Again, it is imperative to state as introductory remarks that the thrust of this research effort is on the influence of billboards in the mobilisation of political electorate in Delta State in the 2023 general election. In in this case, the focus is on the evaluation of audience members. It is also important to clarify that there exists a direct link between the topic of discourse and advertising generally, hence the review of concept of advertising above. Obviously, billboard is one of the media of advertising and in this case, political advertising. Generally speaking, outdoor advertising predates the development of the printing process. Early uses of this medium were for promotion of theatrical performance (Hobbs, 2018). There was a pattern and specific way this was carried out.

Furthermore, Hobbs (2018) noted that bill was placed where passers-by could see them on board, fences, on walls. Thus, the word billboard came into being. According to Hobbs, though they have been around for hundreds of years, the main inspiration behind billboard advertisement can be traced to the Gutenberg's invention of the moveable type in 1450. From the simplest perspective, billboard can be seen as display of paper posters on static sites. However, modern billboards are only static to the point that most of them cannot be moved but technology has made it so that content can be modified by means of LED electronic billboard (Suprayitno, 2016). On the meaning of billboard, Wroblewski (2018) explains that billboards are large posters used for advertising products and services, and date back to the ancient Egyptians. Wroblewski further avers that billboards can be seen as a form of advertising and public relations or promotion simply because one has to pay to be able to display a message.

Political Advertising

Campaigning for elective positions through the mass media is simply referred to and falls within the category of political advertising. This means therefore, that apart from product, service or idea, persons or individuals can also use the media to market themselves for acceptability purposes. During elections, many people who indicate interest for one position or the other makes frantic efforts to ensure success at the polls. This follows the various ideologies and promises that accompany manifestoes by the individual politicians. Based on the foregoing, political advertising can be seen as a tool used by politicians to persuade people to vote for them (Asemah, 2011).

Furthermore, Asemah (2011) opines that since political advertising is used by the political class to get votes from the electorate, "it is therefore part and parcel of political process in Nigeria and any other democratic society" (p. 20) as it also serves as an important source of communication for the voting public. For example, general elections

prior and that of 2023 have always seen several billboards and other forms of outdoor advertising in strategic locations with messages geared towards soliciting for votes from the electorate. States such as Delta State were certainly not left out.

An important aspect of political advertising is political campaign. According to Lilleker (2017), political campaigns are orchestrated by political parties or organisations to attract the support of voters in an election. Political advertising is one of the several elements of political campaign (Ranjan & Upadhyay, 2024). It is no longer a seriously contended matter that mass media pervades our daily lives, advertising being one of the gateways, just as various scholars and communication experts have been able to establish the foregoing in various postulations. However, in politics, advertising campaigns have now become essential tools adopted by candidates or politicians contesting for various positions, to persuade members of the public to vote for them (Ojekwe, 2016). Advertising and public relations are critical components of the entire political structure as the two takes centre stage in promotion of political candidates and parties during campaigns

Literature Review

In the larger context, researchers have focused on political advertising and its use in the political arena. Political advertising simply is the application of persuasive marketing techniques to approach the public with political ideas (Ezegwu et al., 2015). It is systematic, sustained and often deliberate efforts aimed at promoting the cause of a political party, group, political organisation, other interest groups such as voters or electorate, or individual politicians with the primary goal to further or enhance the political process or to achieve political objectives of government at various levels: local, state, national or international. During every election, the voters are usually targeted with varied forms of political strategies and programmes usually put together by political parties and organisations (Okpara et al., 2016). The intention is simply to obtain their support through votes.

Researchers have taken a look at outdoor advertising usage in general and billboard in particular as tool for political advertising towards mobilising voters toward accepting a candidate during an election. The aspect that focuses on billboard as a tool for political communication has also been an area of focus. For example, a study by GeoPoll (2019) found out that walking (billboard advert) and varied outdoor advertising tools ensured the most exposure to advertised contents on the mediums or platforms. On the aspect of political impact, it was ascertained that in the event individuals encounter billboard and a political message inscription, the tendency to halt or delay the movement so as to get

the main gist of the message before moving on becomes higher.

Panagopoulos and Ha (2015) in a study attempted to evaluate billboards' effectiveness as reminders tools toward ensuring citizens cast their votes in an election. The researcher revealed that billboards are not effective in ensuring higher turnout of voters for election. The study was primarily a comparison between billboard and the use of other media forms such as radio, television, and the internet. However, Panagopoulos & Green (2008) had earlier conducted a study where results showed that voters targeted with specific messages are likely to respond to mass media than other not targeted – and this is as per carefully planned communication efforts. The implication is that voters can be targeted and the objectives actualised when communication is planned and appropriate channels utilised.

Political messages have tendencies to be persuasive and deceptive at the same time (Chioma et al., 2015). Though respondents that participated in the survey were of the opinion that political advertising may be deceptive, overall findings of the study show that it is a determining factor in respect of voting decision – as about 25.2% believe that their choice of candidate was affected in the electoral process. Therefore, Chioma et al noted that though there is some form of influence associated political advertising as an aspect of political communication, it may not be the ultimate determinant because of other factors such as ethnicity and political considered by the voters before a final voting decision is made.

The target of billboard (as an aspect of outdoor media) are drivers, and commuters in moving vehicles, passers-by, and the general body of pedestrian traffic; and sometimes characterised by attractive images of models, and catchy slogans carefully crafted to attract attention (Edegoh et al., 2013). It has also been revealed that billboards can be understood from two perspectives; the most common understanding is that of an outdoor poster or sign usually seen on freeways, highways or even street (Duncan, 2013, as cited in Edegoh et al., 2013). Another perspective to understanding the concept is that of an announcement made at different stages of a radio or television programme or broadcast (the beginning, middle or even the end). A billboard can also be seen as an outdoor poster or sign – and is generally known as outdoor advertising considered as the most visible of all other forms of advertising (Swallehe & Mwilongo, 2022).

On a similar note, Edegoh et al. (2013) quoted Wise GEEK (2013) to have described billboard advertising to involve using big signage to promote a variety of goods, services, and causes alongside roads. The idea was further explained by stating that in order for roadside advertising campaigns to be properly considered to as billboards, the signs

utilised must be larger than a specific size. It is interesting to note that, according to Edegoh et al, a billboard sign needs to be sufficiently large for a driver or passenger to be able to read the lettering well while driving down a road.

When we talk about billboards, we mean large format advertising displays that are meant to be viewed from a distance of at least fifty feet (Edegoh et al., 2013). The statements written on billboards are, in a sense, permanent and can be seen repeatedly, which makes them fairly memorable and easy for viewers to recall (Okoro, as cited in Edegoh et al., 2013). Additionally, Edegoh et al. cited Okoro as saying that the following factors contribute to the significance of billboards: fast message delivery, high frequency, high product visibility, strong visual impact, and low cost. In other words, with billboard, advertisers can be rest assured that their messages will get to large number of persons within the shortest time possible and in some ways, leaving a high impact on the audience.

The most significant advantage of billboards over other forms of advertising is their capacity to draw in viewers as soon as they are displayed. Billboards have also been discussed in a way that demonstrates that they not only enhance the aesthetic quality of the area in which they are placed but also act as visually appealing reminders of our past and future (Anna, 2006; Plumely, 2000, as cited in Edegoh et al., 2013). Therefore, when used for campaign in an electioneering process, impact may be high, just as the needed popularity can be achieved by the advertiser in the form of a political party or its candidate in the case of elections in Nigeria.

Theoretic Framework

This study is built on the rational choice theory. According to the notion held by the theory, people's decisions are influenced by their own preferences and their understanding of what is best for them. Additionally, the theory makes the assumption that every action a person takes is logical and the result of carefully weighing the costs and benefits of doing so. As a result, the expected benefit of a planned action must greatly exceed the expense. One of the theory's underlying presumptions is that the subject will undoubtedly stop the activity quickly or eventually if the expected action's value falls well below the expected cost or value. According to this idea, people are consequently expected to make use of the resources at their disposal in order to increase or maximise their rewards. Relatedly, since all acts are first justified based on costs and benefits before being actually taken, the decision to vote in an election depends on the interests and preferences of the individual.

The rational choice theory is the study's theoretical framework since it maintains that

voters rationally seek their interests and benefits. According to Ata-Awaji & Zakari (2020) the link is that just like groups have common goals to which they strive to live for and protect, individuals also have a common interests they strive to hold onto and protect, therefore, regardless of the media messages and persuasion that may accompany the plan to persuade the public, anything that is contrary to the interests of the group and individuals will logically be foregone. This study's theoretical framework is based on the theory of its usefulness in making lucid and vivid illustrations in respect of voting behaviours seen in different individuals.

Methods

The survey research design is the method for this study. Voters that participated in the 2023 general elections in Delta state define the population of the study. Records from the headquarters of Nigeria's electoral umpire; the Independent National Electoral Commission revealed that 3,221,697 is the figure of registered voters in the state. It is equally important to note that this population is heterogeneous in terms of demography. Heterogeneous in the sense that the population is diverse in several dimensions: characters, attitudes and behaviours.

This study's sample size is 400 and it was determined through the use of statistical tool of 'confidence Interval' of 95% and a margin of error of 0.05 as defined in the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula. The complete population of the study, which is 3,221,697 (seven digits), was plotted against the statistical table of random numbers using a statistically produced table of random numbers. Every person in the population had the chance to be chosen. This indicates that any number falling within this range was selected to participate in the research.

The final sample for this study was selected using a multistage sampling technique. The first stage involved the purposive selection of major towns/cities in the three senatorial district of the state namely Delta South, Delta North and Delta Central. By implication, the researchers relied on prior knowledge and purposively selected Warri (in Delta South), Agbor (in Delta North) and Sapele (in Delta Central) as cities for the study. In the second state of sampling, wards in the selected towns and cities were selected with the use of stratified random sampling techniques which yielded wards like Koko I and II in Warri, Boji-Boji I and II as well as Sapele Urban I and IV. The third and final sampling technique involved the use of simple random technique to distribute instrument of data collection which was administered face-to-face to the respondents.

The instrument of data was designed using 5-Item Likert scale and administered accordingly. After months of data gathering, the survey recorded a 96.5 percent

response rate and the data presented hereunder is based on responses from 386 voters in select towns across the three senatorial districts of Delta State. Data was analysed with the use of SPSS' descriptive statistical methods. Variables were duly coded to ensure a seamless computation of the data with the use of the SPSS software.

Results

Table 1: Level of utilisation of billboard as tools for political advertising

Parameters	D [%]	SD [%]	A [%]	SA [%]	U [%]	Mean	Decision
I actively participated in the 2023 elections in Delta state	3 [.3]	7 [1.8]	71 [18.4]	301 [78.0]	4 [1.0]	4.72	Accepted
My active participation culminated in vote cast during the election	5 [1.3]	6 [1.6]	260 [67.4]	110 [28.5]	5 [1.3]	4.20	Accepted
I am aware of the use of the use of billboards for political advertising during the elections	6 [1.6]	6 [1.6]	358 [92.7]	11 [2.8]	5 [1.3]	3.94	Accepted
Among the different media types for advertising, billboards were the most utilised	17 [4.4]	127 [32.9]	9 [2.3]	17 [4.4]	216 [56.0]	1.95	Rejected
The billboards utilised by the various political parties and their candidates were of great quality in layout and standards	13 [3.4]	36 [9.3]	294 [76.2]	22 [5.7]	21 [5.4]	3.73	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2024

KEY: D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree; U=Undecided

Decision Rule: 0.00 – 3.00 = [Rejected] 3.00 – 4.00 = Accepted

As seen in table 1 above, respondents actively participated in the 2023 general elections in Delta state. Accordingly, the mean score of 4.72 as seen in the table is a demonstration that a higher percentage of them participated in the elections. Furthermore, a mean score of 4.20 is also an indication that the respondents' active participation culminated in vote cast during the election. Additionally, the mean score of 3.94 is an indication that voters have knowledge of the use of billboards as tools for political advertising during the election. However, the mean score of 3.73 also demonstrated that the billboards used by the political parties and the candidates fielded were of great quality in layout and standards.

Table 2: Appeals embedded in the billboard advertisements

Parameters	D [%]	SD [%]	A [%]	SA [%]	U [%]	Mean	Decision
Appeals were embedded in the billboard advertisement used during the campaigns	12 [3.1]	7 [1.8]	90 [23.3]	264 [68.4]	13 [3.4]	4.50	Accepted

Youth appeal was the prominent one utilised by most candidates and their parties	31 [8.0]	9 [2.3]	116 [30.1]	210 [54.4]	20 [5.2]	4.20	Accepted
Humour appeal was the most prominent	16 [4.1]	10 [2.6]	12 [3.1]	9 [2.3]	339 [87.8]	1.28	Rejected
Health appeal was the most prominent during the campaigns	23 [6.0]	37 [9.6]	17 [4.4]	11 [2.8]	298 [77.2]	1.50	Rejected
Attack/negative ads, contrasts ads, and image ads were all utilised to stimulate sentiments and appeal to the voters	73 [18.9]	239 [61.9]	20 [5.2]	16 [4.1]	38 [9.8]	2.75	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, 2024

KEY: D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree; U=Undecided

Decision Rule: 0.00 – 3.00 = [Rejected] 3.00 – 4.00 = Accepted

The results in table 2 above is demonstrative of voters' perceptions in respect of the appeals embedded in the billboards used for advertisements during the electioneering campaigns in Delta state. The mean score of 4.50 showed that appeals were actually embedded in the billboard advertisement displayed during the campaigns. Youth appeal was the most prominent as demonstrated by the mean score of 4.20 while 1.28 mean score is an indication that humour appeal was not the most prominent appeal. Similar results were recorded for health appeal with mean score of 1.50 indicating that it was not the most prominent. Additionally, the mean score of 2.75 implies that attack/negative ads, contrast ads, and image ads were all utilised just to stimulate sentiments and appeal to voters during the elections in the state.

Table 3: Level of influence of billboard advertising

Parameters	D [%]	SD [%]	A [%]	SA [%]	U [%]	Mean	Decision
General outlook and views of the candidate shaped by the type of appeal embedded in the billboard to which I was exposed	79 [20.5]	124 [32.1]	18 [4.7]	12 [3.1]	153 [39.6]	2.11	Rejected
Exposure to billboard shaped my views about the general election	14 [3.6]	6 [1.6]	27 [7.0]	14 [3.5]	325 [84.2]	1.42	Rejected
Political messages on billboards influenced my decision to vote during the election	15 [3.9]	14 [3.6]	18 [4.7]	10 [2.6]	329 [85.2]	1.38	Rejected
Exposure to political message on billboards greatly influenced by choice of candidate during the election	48 [12.4]	73 [18.9]	24 [6.2]	64 [16.6]	177 [45.9]	2.35	Rejected

Billboards messages on the pedigree of candidates was a major highlight in political advertising in the period	4	73	32	60	217	2.26	Rejected
	[1.0]	[18.9]	[8.3]	[15.5]	[56.2]		

Source: Field Survey, 2024
KEY: D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree; U=Undecided
Decision Rule: 0.00 – 3.00 = [Rejected] 3.00 – 4.00 = Accepted

Results in table 3 above showed that general outlook and views of the candidates were not actually shaped by the type of appeal embedded in the billboards to which the respondents were exposed and this is based on 2.11 mean score. Relatedly, results also demonstrated that respondents rejected the notion that exposure to billboard shaped their views about the general elections as seen in 1.42 mean score. The mean score of 1.38 is an indication that respondents also rejected the notion that political messages on billboards influenced their decision to vote during the election. Furthermore, data in the table is demonstrative of a rejection of the notion that exposure to political message on billboards had great influence on choice of candidate while 2.26 mean score is an indication that the notion that billboards messages on pedigree of candidates was a major highlight in political advertising of the period.

Discussion

Findings from the study showed that there was active participation in the general elections in 2023 in Delta and that it culminated in the vote cast by the voters. It was also revealed that there is general knowledge of the use of billboards as tools for political advertising during the elections among voters in the state. Additionally, the study showed that billboard was not the most utilised among the different media types explored by politicians and their political parties during the electioneering campaigns. However, the billboards utilised had good duality in standards and layout implying that there was priority on aesthetics by the different political elements. The result that billboard was not the most utilised tool in Delta sharply contrast earlier findings from a similar study that revealed that same tools were the most used during the 2019 elections in Nasarawa state and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Inobemhe et al., 2022).

The implication of the above result is that of the dynamics in outdoor advertising across different parts of Nigeria. What works in the South may not be exactly same in the North of the country. Whereas, results of the study by Inobemhe et al (2022) revealed a wide use and acceptance of billboards as prominent tools for outdoor advertising in the previous elections in parts of Northern Nigeria, this current study differs revealing that the advertising across billboard were not as prominent during the 2023 elections in

Delta state located in the Southern part of same country. The factors could be cultural or social. This resonates with the study conducted by Kalilu and Alimi (2022) on advertising designs and how cultural icons play a significant role.

Results from the survey revealed that there was general use of appeals as embedded in the billboards advertisements used during campaigns in the general elections conducted in Delta state. Youth appeal happened to be the most prominent utilised by candidates and their political parties. In contrast, the study revealed that humour and health appeal were not so prominently explored within the period under review. Furthermore, the researchers revealed that attack ads/negative ads, contrast ads, and image ads were not utilised to stimulate sentiments and appeal to voters during the electioneering campaigns. In the study conducted by Inobemhe et al (2022), core emotional appeal happened to be the most prominent in billboard advertising during the 2019 elections in North Central areas of Nasarawa and the FCT. In contrast with the results of this study, the researchers also revealed youth appeal to be the third most prominent.

The researchers also found that the voters' views and general outlook about the candidates was not actually shaped by the type of appeal embedded in the billboards used during the campaigns. This is close to another result from the field survey where researchers revealed that the views/perceptions held by voters were not shaped by their exposure to billboard messages. Additionally, the choice of candidates during the period was not based on the voters' exposure to messages across billboards used as tools for political advertising during campaigns. Finally, the study revealed that billboard messages with focus on candidates' pedigree were not a major highlight during the campaigns. The implication of these results is that billboards were not influential in shaping voters' behaviour and actions during the elections.

Above findings contrast findings from earlier studies such as Essien (2021), Inobemhe et al (2022), and Nwankwo and Arimitan (2021) that revealed that billboards influenced decision of voters in different parts of Nigeria. It, however, resonates with findings from a study by Ojekwe (2016) that demonstrated political campaigns have no strong effect on voting behaviours of electorate. It is also based on the rational choice theory's postulation that individuals take every action from a rational point of view and not necessarily about external influence as they must have weighed the cost and benefits of their actions. In electoral decision, therefore, it is not just about exposure to billboard messages but ultimately about choice and interest considering what they stand to gain from their voting decision and support to a particular candidate and party in an election.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study concludes that political advertising has become an indispensable phenomenon in contemporary society's political activities. Billboards as aspects of the general architecture of political advertising are valuable and viable but are not ultimately influential in respect of the decisions of voters and their voting pattern during elections. Accordingly, these voters have different other considerations that may influence that final choice of candidates and political parties during elections. This however does not diminish the place of billboards in projecting the candidates because as critical outdoor advertising tools that often get strategic placement, billboards are great selling points for candidates and other political actors. Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations are made:

1. That though the use of billboard should continually be explored as viable tool of advertising as per exposing the voters to the candidates, but must not be seen as ultimate deciders of the fate of a candidate's future fortunes at the polls. This is necessary to ensure that alternatives are also explored.
2. Stakeholders including political parties, policy and political research institutes and candidates must synergise to improve billboard advertising in particular and outdoor advertising in general. This becomes imperative to ensure viable alternatives to the traditional tools of radio, television, newspaper and magazine. This is to ensure that there are alternatives to the use of internet and social media.

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