


## Public Relations Political Advertising Campaign and Voters' Attitude: Evidence from 2023 General Election in South-East, Nigeria

Nwanmuoh, Emmanuel Ejiofo<sup>1</sup>; Okolo-Obasi, Nduka Elda Vitalis <sup>2</sup>; Imo, Godwin Ibe<sup>3</sup>; Udu, Francisa Tochukwu<sup>4</sup>; and Emeter, Patrick Okechukwu<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Marketing, Faculty of Business Administration, Enugu Campus, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. <sup>2</sup>Institute for Development Studies, Enugu Campus, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Banking and Finance, Faculty of Business Administration, Enugu Campus, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. <sup>4</sup>Department of Music, Faculty of Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

<sup>5</sup>Department of Marketing, Faculty of Business Administration, Enugu Campus, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

Corresponding author: [nduka-obasi.pg82232@unn.edu.ng](mailto:nduka-obasi.pg82232@unn.edu.ng)

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### Abstract

The purpose of this work was to assess public relations political advertising campaign in Nigeria's general elections. Particular emphasis was on its effect on voter attitude in the 2023 general election in southeast region as it concerns voter registration, voter turnout and voters' acceptance of election outcome. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to answer the three research questions. Primary data were generated from a sample of 400 selected respondents from the states using multi-staged sampling techniques. Results from the use of logit model shows that public relations political advertising campaign have made significant effect in changing voter attitude in the region and that a unit increase in the campaign has the odd ration of 4.5 time as large for voter registration, 5.2 time as large for voter turnout and 2.0 times as large for voter's acceptance of outcome. Hence, the unit increase will create about 4.5, 5.2, and 2.0 more likelihood for potential voters to register, turnout to vote and accept the outcome respectively. The study concluded that public relations political advertising campaign has the capacity to change voter attitude and recommended that every effort should be made to encourage issue based public relations political advertising campaign and for electoral umpires to manage the process well so as to preserve the changes recorded as a result.

**Keywords:** Public Relations, Political Advertising, Campaign, Attitude, Voting, General Election, Nigeria.

### Introduction

General election is a recognized method with which consent of the governed is translated into governmental authority. To Ogundiran (2020), election is the central hub of democratic political system the ethical foundation of democracy which stands for the opinion of the majority. The implication of this according to Diamond (2015), George-Genyi (2017), Ahmad et al (2019), Taghizade and Yildirim (2024) is that elections should be free, fair, credible and must accurately mirror the will of the electorate. Unfortunately, for over two

decades, the position of elections in Nigeria appears to have been a complete departure from these (Agu *et al*, 2013). To Olubunmi and Folorungo (2020), it appears election in Nigeria hardly reflect the people's will and for election to reflect the will of the electorate in Nigeria, a radicle shift must be witnessed in the voters' attitude.

Historically, elections process in Nigeria have continued to witnessed immense low participation in the areas of voter registration, turnout and confidence. According to National Bureau of Statistics (2022), in the past general election, while only about 52.3% of the registered voters turned out to vote in 1999, a significant increase was recorded in 2003 with about 69% turnout. However, the increase in turn out according to Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2022) was not sustained in the subsequent election as turnout to general elections continued to decline to 57.5%, 53.7%, 43.7% and 34.8% in 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 respectively. Still on the same note, Amaechi *et al* (2018) bemoans the nonchalant attitude of grown up adult toward voter registration especially in the south eastern part of Nigeria. To Emodi (2019), the attitude of young adult of towards political participation in south-east Nigeria should be a source of serious worries to any well-meaning Nigerian of south-east extraction.

While the 2023 general elections approached, eagerness amongst voters appeared to have increased, willingness to participate was earnestly demonstrated by eligible voter with the quest to get registered and collect their permanent voters' card as early as 2021/2022. This unprecedented quest was so obvious in the south-eastern Nigeria that people had to close their business for days and endured the queuing system to make sure they registered as voter. According to Odionye *et al* (2023) such quest for registration culminated into an extraordinary resolve of the people to massively turnout to vote with determination to protect their vote.

Many political watcher and social commentators attributed this change in attitude to effective use of public relation political advertising campaign of the candidates and political parties which seemed to be at a higher level. Studies Awotayo *et al* (2023), Odionye *et al* (2023), show that the Nigerian electorates were equitably informed about the candidates, parties, issues and manifestoes using public relation tools. Also using the same public relation tools, the electoral umpire built the confidence of voters concerning the integrity of the polls.

Over the years, studies, Adnsolabehere, Iyengar and Valentino, (1994), Brains and Wittenberg (1996), Wittenberg and Brains (1999) Ridout, Shah, Goldstein, & Franz (2004) Alvarez and Shankar (2006) have attempted to understand the relationships between political advertisements and important political outcomes, including political knowledge, political participation, voter mobilization, voter choice, attitude and candidate evaluation. As noted by Abramowitz and Segal, (1992), Kaid, (2005) that, public relations political advertising has become the primary tool that candidates and parties use to communicate with voters. The 2023 Nigeria's general election witnessed an out of class use of public relations political advertising campaign.

However, the output of the 2023 election appears not to have justified the humongous PR input made in the political advertising campaign as the turnout of voters still indicated about 17% reduction in the percentage turn of 2019 general election and about 58% reduction in that of 2003. The confidence of the electorates also appeared to have been eroded by the manner of voting and result announcement. In a country trying to consolidate democracy after a long history of authoritarian military rule, strategies for mobilizing people for popular participation and effective engagement in the electoral process have to be well-conceptualized and carefully designed. In doing this, peoples' perceptions and attitudes have to be studied, analysed, understood and taken into consideration.

Therefore, in the light of the foregoing, the need to study the effect of public relations political advertising campaign on voters' attitude with a special focus on the Nigeria's 2023 general election in Southeast, became imperative with a view to meeting international best practice. The positioning of this study attempts to establish the level of effect public relations political advertising campaign made on voters' attitude during the 2023 general election in South-East Nigeria in the area of voter registration, voter turnout and voters' acceptance of election results. These three areas of focus similarly represent three main questions notably:

1. What is the effect public relations political advertising campaign on voter registration?
2. What is the effect of public relations political advertising campaign on voters' turnout?
3. What is the effect public relations political advertising campaign on voters' acceptance of election results?

### Study Hypothesis

Public relations political advertising campaign has gained tremendous attention over the past years in Nigeria political environment (Akinmade & Azhar 2015). Where political processes are implemented with a public relations outlook, the political parties involved are aware that they have to objectively market their candidates in order to elicit party loyalty within electioneering period. According to Nwachukwu *et al* (2016), Egobueze and Ojirika (2017), during political campaigns, parties and candidates dish out promises to sway the votes of electorates in theirs or their party's favour. Whether the promises are made with good intentions of fulfillment if elected into power and offices may not be covered in this study, the emphasis is that such promises are conveyed to the electorates with the use of public relation advertisement campaign. According to Gangai and Agrawal (2016); Yizhang (2015); Aldemir and Bayraktaroglu (2005), Ochonogor & Amadi (2019) political parties and candidates seek to engage with their party members and other potential voters to ensure that they feel loved, involved and excited about the party ideas and the candidates manifestoes. Beyond this, they portray themselves as dexterous in the pursuit of whatever political goals they have set out to achieve; giving voters the impression that if given chance

to govern, they would execute their plans promptly and fulfill the wishes of their voters for good governance and sustainable development.

Extant literature, Benjamin et al. (2019); Horsfall and Mack Kingsley (2019); Yizhang (2015); Gangai and Agrawal (2016) on brand personality are domiciled in commercial or profit-oriented marketing domain while few that explored the relationship between political science and public relations failed to empirically establish the influence of public relations political advertising campaign on partisan voter attitude of a political candidate. Also, the few explored literature, for instance, Horsfall Mac-Kingsley (2019); Jaafaru (2019); Emodi (2019) on brand personality in Nigeria's electoral process, did not indicate its applicability in influencing voter behavior/electoral decision of those who are apathetic in political processes and elections. Thus, we hypothesize in this study that:

- Public relations political advertising campaign has no significant effect on voter registration
- Public relations political advertising campaign has no significant effect on voters' turnout
- Public relations political advertising campaign has no significant effect on voters' acceptance of election results

The subsequent parts of the paper are organized as follows. Section 2 looks at the background, literature and theoretical underpinnings. Section 3 describes the materials and method. Section 4 present the empirical results. Section 5 discusses the findings. Finally, section 6 concludes with implications and future research directions.

## Literature and Theoretical Underpinnings

### Review of Related Literature

Political public relations study focuses on the political institution and their actions as a hybrid discipline that draws from more established fields such as public relations, political communication and marketing (Stromback, Mitrook, & Kioussis 2010). Literature has documented the effects of political public relations political advertising in various respects. Brains and Wattenberg (1996), Nwanmuoh (2020) suggested that political campaign advertising plays an important role both in voter's political learning and their evaluations of candidates based on this learning. Alvarez and Shankster (2006) on their part maintains that televised campaign advertisements, including attack ads, could influence candidate evaluations and preferences. Over the years, a tremendous number of studies have focused on assessing the relationships between negative political ads and voter's turnout.

The findings of several studies are inconsistent. Although some studies (Ansola-behere, Iyengar & Simon, 1999, Adnsolabehehere, Iyengar, Simon & Valentino, 1994) suggest that negative campaign advertising hinders electoral participation, other studies (Finkel & Geer, 1998; Lau, Sigelman, Heldman & Babbitt 1999) rejected demobilization claims. On the contrary, some studies (Freedman & Goldstein, 1999; Gear & Lau, 2006; Goldstein & Freedman, 2002; Wattenberg & Brains, 1999; Uduji *et al*, 2019a) found that negative ads may stimulate voters' turnout. Garramone and Colleagues (1990) found that exposure to

negative ads and exposure to positive ads do not differ in terms of the likelihood of mobilizing voter to vote.

Assessments of public relations political campaign advertising effects should not ignore the international nature of various types of effects. Mobilization and persuasion are closely related campaign effects in that voter turnout can result from persuasion as well. Holbrook and McClurg (2005), Nwanmuoh *et al* (2022) argued that "independents needs to be persuaded and mobilized, while partisans mainly need to be mobilized" and "what are often interpreted as persuasive effects may in fact be the product of mobilization" (Amaechi *et al*, 2018; Ogundiran, 2020). In political campaigns, candidate may select specific messages to communicate through their ads. By pushing messages that are favourable to themselves rather than to their opponents, candidates attempt to prime citizens so that they become voters who will rate them higher than the competition and vote accordingly (Ochonogor & Ukaegbu, 2010; George-Genyi, 2017; Uduji & Okolo-Obasi, 2018a). According to (Kapferer, 2018), unlike product campaigns, in which competing brands are usually not mentioned, at least not by name, political campaigns often make explicit references to opponents. In political campaign, voters are often bombarded with both positive and negative messages about the candidates (Yusuf, 2015; Suberu *et al*, 2016).

When it comes to voter attitudes towards political ads, there are other semantic dimensions in addition to negativity. The semantic characteristics that political ads possess can be defined by respondents' subjective attitudes towards the ads. In investigating both televised campaign ads and newspaper coverage, Kahn and Kennedy (1999) found that people's judgements about the nature of any negativity presented influence whether or not they vote at all. People were more likely to vote if they considered the negative information useful and legitimate, whereas they were less likely to vote if they considered the negative information irrelevant and unsubstantiated (Kahn & Kenney. Hill (1998), Ochonogor & Omego (2012) Yusufu (2020) suggested that negative ads may communicate to voters a negative image of the political process, which may be perceived as a type of entertainment. Garramone (1984) argued that the perceived truthfulness of negative political ads determines whether the ads produce the intend effects. Respondents' subjective attitudes towards political ads have not been emphasized in existing studies in research along these lines. Thus, the present study is exploratory in that it extends prior research by examining voter's attitude towards negative political ads together with two additional ways of considered the ads: the extent to which they are considered entertaining and the extent to which they are considered truthful. Attitude towards any given ads in terms of whether it is negative, entertainment, or truthful can vary from person to person. This study therefore predicts that people's attitude towards PR political advertising could influence how likely they are to vote for a given candidate. In particular, there could be backlash effects for the sponsoring ads perceived as negative, entertaining, and/or untruthful.

Furthermore, people's perceptions of the impact of the media and peoples' mass media use behaviours may influence their attitude towards the ads. Kosieki and Meleod (1990) argued that people's information processing strategies, which influence their comprehension of

and learning about mass-mediated messages, developed based in part on their perceptions of media. In particular, TV and radio are the two major media platforms for running political campaign ads in the developed and developing countries (Sulaimon, & Sagie, 2015; Agbor, 2019). Although the difference between media modalities in this regard have not been well documented in the literature, researchers have suggested that television has some unique attributes that help people learn about campaign messages. According to Graber (2001), audiovisual information enhances memory and thus increases recall and accuracy because information presented in such a way is more useful than verbal stimuli in providing shortcuts based on which people form impressions about unfamiliar people and issues in the news. Authors, Nwachukwu and Udensi (2017), Okolo-Obasi, and Uduji (2021) noted that a political candidate or party could be modelled as brand through the name and ideological postures, which supposedly communicate a message to voters, party faithful/supporters and sponsors. Some of the attributes of brand personality have been highlighted by Aaker (1997) and expanded by Kapferer (2018) Emodi (2019). These attributes include honesty, respectability sincerity, doggedness, etc. Other brand personality attributes are the candidate's image, candidate's affluence, candidate's character, education status, name, reputation, among others (Egobueze & Ojirika, 2017; Achor *et al*, 2017). In public relations political advertising campaign, electoral candidates offer themselves as products to the vote market, and they are assessed for adoption by voters via their offerings and personality (Achor & Moguluwa, (2012), like in consumer marketing, consumers expect to buy solutions to their problems or needs, the same way voters expect to cast their ballot for a candidate in anticipation that they can attend to their socio-political needs, which includes offering good governance (Horsfall & Ikegwuru, 2019).

Public relations political scholars use this analogy to explore the ideological thrust in answering pertinent questions regarding political products, which election of candidates are an integral part of (Nwachukwu, Achor & Udensi, 2017; Achor and Moguluwa, 2012; Cwalina & Falkowski, 2014). Ideally, candidates market their programmes through public relations political advertising during electioneering campaign and voters respond to their offering either by voting at all. Besides the party programmes or candidate manifestoes, there are other intangible and tangible values or attributes voters look out for in their overall assessments of candidates in any election, be it presidential, governorship and local government election. One of such values cum attributes that the voters look out for as they evaluate and process information meant to win their support is embedded in candidate's character, personality appropriately designated in political marketing literature as brand personality (Horsfall & Ikegwuru, 2019; Uduji, Okolo-Obasi & Asongu, 2020).

Research on voting behavior indicates that many factors impact people's votes attitude for a candidate. For example, voters may be influenced by economic conditions, ethnicity party affiliation, incumbent performance, religion, and campaign issues. Based on studies Horowitz (2015) Butter & Harris (2016), Gangan and Agrawal (2016), Benjamin *et al* (2019) conducted internationally, analysts have found that voters may base their decisions on one or more of the above factors. Ames (2015) noted that distinctive factors, such as ethnicity,

family lineage, campaign issues and religion influence voting behavior and attitude in African. Antoakis and Olaf, (2015), identified party affiliation, campaign issues and incumbent performance that influence African voters during election.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

We anchored this study on cognitive mobilisation theory of political literacy and participation which is a process that opens to the people cognitive indication upon which they make decision on participating in political activities like voter registration and turning out to vote. This theory was propounded by John Dalton in 1984 with the main thrust of political education and political engagement act that enables individual mobilise their mental capabilities in dealing with politics. To Dalton (1984), Tan Cho, (1999), Denny & Doyle, (2008), Okpara, Anuforo, and Achor (2016), the Cognitive mobilisation theory of political literacy and participation argues that political education increases engagement in politics by developing the citizens' cognitive skills, enabling them to process complex information about the political system and enhance their feeling of civic duties. According to (Dalton, 1984; Tan Cho, 1999), the theory emphasis that political education has a very strong effect because it reduces the costs and increases the benefit of voting in multiple ways.

To Adeoti and Olaniyan (2014), education increases the cognitive skills that facilitate learning about politics. This is why Egobueze and Ojirika (2017), concludes that, the well-educated receive more satisfaction from electoral participation. Tan Cho (1999) notes that it is not necessarily higher education that increases one's likelihood of voting, rather the socialization process that is provided through education. Underpinning this study with this theory is on the basis that constant voter education programmes through public relation tools are expected to increase voter's awareness of election and political issues.

On the other hand, fundamental assumption of the sociological theory is that one's voting preference is to a greater extent influenced by individual membership in a particular social group the economic and social position of the group (Nwachukwu, *et al*, 2016), thus people who Share the same identity as far as their social class, religion or ethnicity are concerned to tend to vote as a bloc, in such a way that voting for a particular candidate or party becomes an inherent extension of the Voter's social identity (Okpala *et al*, 2016). Consequently, social groups vote for the candidate or party that is perceived as representing their interests or that is most likely to prioritize their needs (Lust-Orkar, 2007). Voter's attitude or choice, therefore is a type of social activity. Put simply, the social environment helps determine the political adherence of citizens (Ashton & Lee, 2007).

Multiple case studies in Africa, Butter and Harris (2016), Ahmed et al, (2018), Benjamin et al, (2019) have established further support for the sociological basis of voting. The linkage between ethnicity and voting in Africa has been examined by several scholars. According to Horowitz (2005), ethnicity exerts a strong direct influence on segmented societies by generating a long-term psychological sense of party loyalty, anchoring citizens to parties. As a result, casting a voted in multi-ethnic societies becomes an expression of group



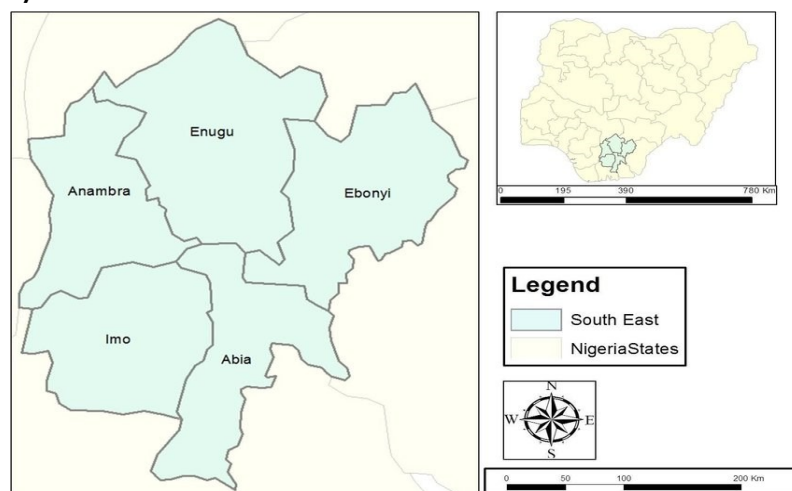
identify. To Horowitz, ethnic parties derive their support from an identifiable ethnic group and serve the interest of that group. In societies where such ethnic parties flourish, Horowitz argues that elections essentially become an ethnic census (Horowitz, 2005) because people are more likely to vote in ethnic blocs if they live in societies with high rates of ethnic cleavage. Voting attitude in such communities is based on ethnic considerations, as members will prefer to have one of their own as a leader. Alsamydai and Khasawneh (2013), Okolo-Obasi *et al* (2021) agreed with these viewpoints by stating that Africa elections and electoral campaigns are not based on issues. As a result, political parties and candidates focused on ethnic bonds, the personality of candidates, party loyalty, and symbols to canvass votes. This happens because elections in Africa often involve the mobilization of ethnic support, especially in elections where the political elite cannot articulate better policies. This dominant view is corroborated in studies conducted by Homer and Rajeev (2004); Allen and Olson (2015), Debrah (2008); Ashton and Lee (2007); Butter and Harris (2016).

However, a study of Nigeria elections complicates the above viewpoint. Lewis (2007) observes that though identity is vital in Nigeria politics, ethnicity is not the only axis of identification. Beyond ethnicity, identity in Nigeria is also derived from class and religion. Furthermore, Nwachukwu *et al* (2016), Asongu *et al* (2019c), finds that identity is relatively fluid, as such, identity politics may be more salient in some parts of the country than in others.

Nevertheless, Okpara, Anuforo, and Achor (2016), Egobueze and Ojirika (2017) Uduji *et al* (2019b) Ezeajughu (2021) Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2022), Nwanmuoh *et al* (2023), agreed that ethnic feelings are most vigorous, in the southern part of Nigeria (south-south, and south-east), where people feel discriminated against and exploited. This suggests that the lack of society will create fertile across a multi-ethnic politics to be expressed.

## Materials and Method

### Area of Study



**Figure 1:** Constituent administrative states of the South-East, Nigeria

Source: Anejionu, Nwilo and Ebinne (2013)



The study was conducted in South-East geopolitical region of Nigeria. The South-East region is made up of five states which include, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. The region has 95 Local Government Areas (LGAs) and a total land area of 29525Km<sup>2</sup> with a projected population of about 21,955,414 (NBS, 2020). The population density of the region according to NPC (2019) is about 744 people per Km<sup>2</sup>; this is two and half times far more than the mean national population density of 140 persons per Km<sup>2</sup>. About 61% of the population is under 30 years, likewise, about 51% of the population is female (NPC, 2019; NBS, 2020). The region is bounded in North-West by Kogi State, in the South-West by Delta and Rivers States, South-South by Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers States, and North-East by Benue State. See Figure 1 in Appendix for the map of the study area.

### Research Design

In this study, we adopted explanatory research designs where observation of the influence of the explanatory variables on the dependent variable establishes a relation between the cause and effect of a happening (Cook and Campbell, 2009). The design is used in exploring a phenomenon with the aim of establishing the relationship between the variables. Therefore, explanatory design was deemed suitable in finding the effect of the political public relation on voters' attitude.

### Sample Size

Using the formula developed by Taro Yamane (1967), we computed the sample size for this study as follows:

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

In this equation, while N is total or finite population of the study, e stands for level of significance (Limit of tolerable error) and 1 is unity (constant)

$$n = \frac{10,907,606}{1 + 10,907,606(5^2)} = n = \frac{10,907,606}{27269.02} = n = 400$$

### Sampling procedure

In selecting the respondents used for this study, we employed a multi-stage sampling method using both quota and simple random samplings techniques. In the first stage, we selected two local government areas (LGAs) each from the five states of South-east region. This was to ensure that each state gets a quota of the sample size commensurate with her population. In the second stage, we listed all the political wards in each of the selected local government and purposefully selected the first two wards with the highest voting populations.

In the final stage, with the aid of community gate keepers, we selected voters randomly from the twenty political ward. With this, we selected at least 20 respondents from each ward giving us a total of 40 respondents per LGA, at least 80 respondents per state, hence

the total of 400 respondents as determined by equation 1 the sample was distributed according to the population of the state as follows:

**Table 1:** Sample size determination table

States	Total Population of Registered Voters	% of Total Population	Sample State	Sample per LGA
Abia	2,120,808	19	78	26
Anambra	2,656,606	24	97	32
Ebonyi	1,597,726	16	59	19
Enugu	2,112,793	19	77	25
Imo	2,419,922	22	89	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,907,606</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>134</b>

**Source:** INEC, 2022/Authors' Calculation

### Data Collection

We collected both primary and secondary data used in this work. The primary data was the main data used while the secondary data was used to substantiate the findings from the primary data. In the collection of primary data, participatory research technique was used. The participatory technique was chosen because the opinions of those being studied is vital and the management of such was very essential (Asongu *et al*, 2019b; Uduji & Okolo-Obasi 2021). We used this participatory research technique of survey with structured questionnaire in gathering data especially as it concerns the effect of political public relations advertising campaign on voters' attitude.

The study used structure questionnaire directly-administered to the respondents as a suitable tool to assess qualitative issues by quantitative information. Using this questionnaire, scores were distributed according to the objectives of the study. In administering the questionnaire, we engaged the services of local research assistants. These local research assistants were recruited because of ruggedness of the terrain.

### Validation and Reliability Test of the Instrument

While validity of an instrument is the degree to which it can capture in right qualification that which it is set out to measure, reliability of such instrument is determined by the level of consistency of result obtained in using the instrument repeatedly (Asongu *et al*, 2020b; Okolo-obasi & Uduji, 2021). Therefore, to establish the content validity of the survey instrument used for primary data collection in this study; we engaged the services of experts both in the academia and otherwise to make input both before and after pilot testing of the instrument.

Also, to confirm reliability of the instrument, the researchers carried out pretest with 40 respondents randomly selected from two local government areas in Southeast states of Enugu and Abia. The response from the pretest were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha index of reliability whose result indicated 87%.

### Ethics Observation

In this study, we acknowledged that the footing of ethical research is 'informed consent'; as a result, we embraced the ethics of informed consent. All the participants in the survey were made to have a clear knowledge of the questions and how the data were expected to be utilized. They were also guaranteed that there are no implications thereafter. In carrying out this study, we entered into a consent agreement with leaders of each community. Here we spelt out who the researchers and their assistants are, the aim of the study, what data to be collected from participants and how the data will be utilized/reported, as well as the possible dangers (if any) of participating in the study. We did this because we were duly informed that participant will not participate without the consent of community gate keepers, hence, the consent needed was the consent of the community leaders who then helped us to select final respondents. In no way was force, coaxing or pressure used on any respondent or participant into getting involved in this study. We kept up privacy and discretion of information as assured to the voluntary participants (respondents).

### Methods of Data Analysis

In analyzing the effect of public relation political advertising campaign on voter attitude in the south-east Nigeria, data collected and collated from the field were treated cautiously and rigorously and both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions.

We presented results from the descriptive statistics in tables, figures and charts while, inferential statistic of a logit model of change in attitude or not was estimated as functions of selected socio-economic variables of the respondent. To estimate this model, we adopted Uduji and Okolo-obasi (2019, 2023) with modifications to state that for binominal response variables, the logistic link is the natural logarithm of the odds ratios generally represented as follows:

$$\log \left[ \frac{P_i}{1 - P_i} \right] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{i1} + \beta_2 x_{i2} + \dots + \beta_k x_{ik} \quad \text{Equation 2}$$

With equation 2, we estimated the effect of public relation political advertisement campaign on voters' attitude in voter registration, voter turnout and voter acceptance of election outcome in south-east region as follow:

$$\text{Logit (VRTA)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PRPAC} + \beta_2 X_{1...n} + \beta_3 Y_{1...n} + \beta_4 K + \mu \quad \text{Equation 3}$$

Where:

VRTA = represent the dependent variable which include voter registration, voter turnout and voter acceptance of electoral outcome.

PPRAC = stands for public relations political advertisement campaign

$X_{1...n}$  = stands for other individual socio economic variables (Age, marital status education, occupation, political affiliation, etc.)

$Y_{1...n}$  = stands for other communal variables (state of origin, availability of infrastructure, etc.)

$K$  = stands for other moderating variables and

$\mu$  = stochastic error term.

\*In this model, the main parameter of interest is  $\beta_1$  in terms of sign and significance.

The study employed three indicators of voter attitude as dependent variables. These are:

- voter registration and collection of voter's card
- voter turnout to vote and protect their vote
- voter acceptance of election outcome

## Results and Discussion

### Socio- Economic Characteristics

The study started analysis of the respondents' view with a description of some of their demographic (age, marital status etc), social (education etc), and economic (occupation, household income) characteristic. These characteristics are important in understanding the differences in the socio-economic and demographic status of the voters across the five states of southeast region.

Analysis (Table 2) indicates that about 63% of the respondents were between the ages of 18-37 years while about 24% are between 38 to 47 years. This is an indication that our respondents are mainly those within their active years as about 87% falls within this 18 to 47 year. While only about 13% are above 47 years, only 1% of the total respondents fall above 62year. To this, the study believes that, public relations with mass media can make significant effect on the electorate as majority are within active age.

**Table 2:** Socio- economic Characteristics of the Respondents

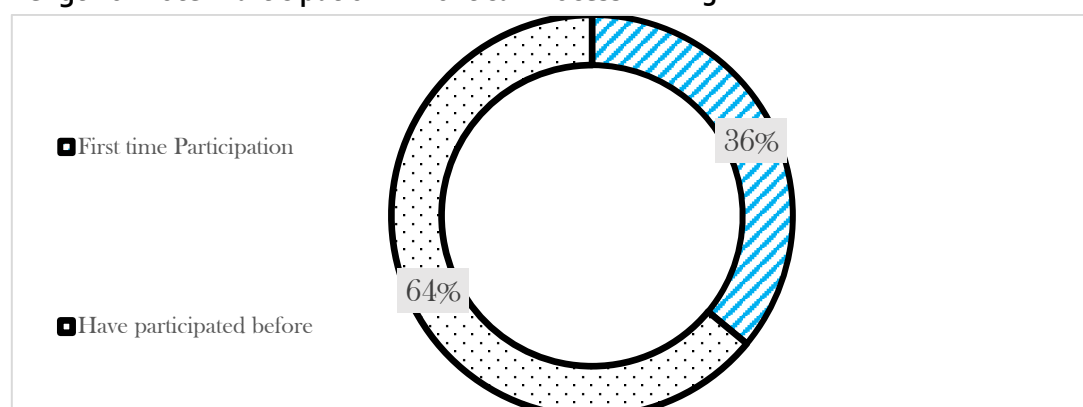
Variables	Freq	%	Cum
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	235	59	59
Female	175	41	100
	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Age of Respondents</b>			
18 -22 Years	10	3	3
23-27 Years	60	15	18
28-32 Years	81	20	38
33-37 Years	101	25	63
38-42 Years	56	14	77
43-47 Years	39	10	87
48-52 Years	23	6	93
53-57 Years	16	4	97
58-62 Years	9	2	99
Above 62 Years	5	1	100
	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Level of Education</b>			
None	27	7	7

Primary	163	41	48
Secondary	112	28	76
Tertiary	81	20	96
Others	17	4	100
	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Religion</b>			
Christians	280	70	70
Moslems	12	3	73
African traditional religion	67	17	90
None	41	10	100
	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Single	106	27	27
Married	228	57	84
Widow	39	10	93
Divorced/Separated	27	7	100
	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Household Size</b>			
1-4 Person	236	59	59
5-9 Person	110	28	87
10-14 Person	42	11	97
15 Person and above	12	3	100
	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Primary Occupation</b>			
Farming	85	21	21
Trading	174	44	65
Fishing	15	4	69
Paid Employment	38	10	79
Handicraft	61	15	93
Others	27	7	100
	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	
<b>Monthly Income</b>			
1000 - 50,000	19	5	5
51,000 - 100,000	85	21	26
101,000 - 150,000	115	29	55
151,000 - 200,000	68	17	72
201,000 - 250,000	52	10	82
251,000 - 300,000	39	6	87
Above 300,000	22	13	100
	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>	

On the other hand, while 59% of the respondents are males, only 41% are females. This confirms the dominance of male in political participation in the region as opined by Okpara, Anuforo, & Achor (2016), Uduji *et al* (2019c, 2023a, 2023b).

On the education level of the respondents, only about 7% of the respondent are not educated formally, about 93 of the respondents has at least basic primary education. This shows that in the region, education is not much barrier in understanding electioneering process. The analysis also shows that, while bulk of the respondents (about 70%) are of the Christian faith, 17% believe in the African traditional religion, only 3% are of Muslim faith and about 10% did not indicate their religion. The implication here is that packaging public relations political advertisement programme must be very conscious not to offend the Christian faith. Other characteristic analyzed are primary occupation of the respondents which shows that while 44% of the respondents are traders, 21% are farmers and 15% are involved in handicraft (carpenter, mechanics, bricklayers, painters etc). the implication is that about 80% of the respondents are self-employed meaning that if reasonable efforts are not made through political public relations advertisement campaign, they may not be interesting in electioneering process. However, the result also shows that about 55% of the respondents earn between NGN1000 to N150,000 (USD 0.6 to USD100) monthly. This show that level of poverty is high and people can easily sell their vote to ensure that they eat at least during the voting period.

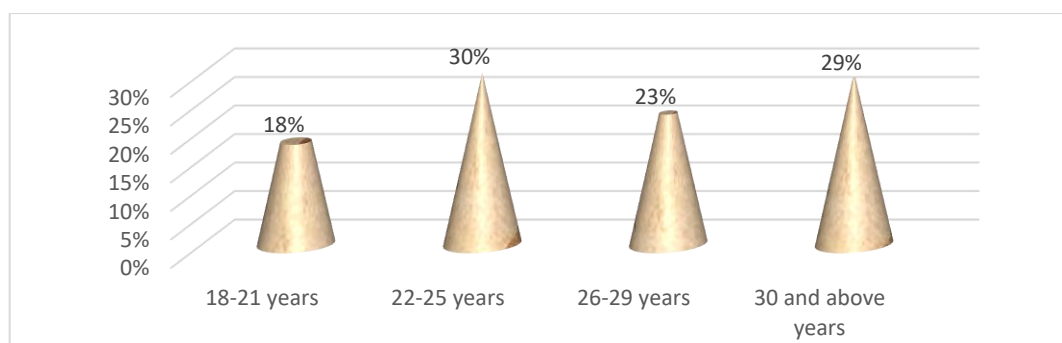
**Length of Voter Participation in Political Process in 2023**



**Figure 2** Percentage distribution of respondents by reason for political participation

**Source:** Computed from the field data by author.

Analysis of Figure 3 shows that while 64% of respondents that participated in the 2023 Nigeria general election are old time participants who have participated in at least one previous election cycle, about 36% are voters who are participating in electoral process for the first time. This shows that the number of first timers in the election increased to large extent compared to other previous general election. This finding agrees with Odionye *et al* (2023), who concluded that the 2023 general election recorded unprecedented awareness creation especially among first timers.

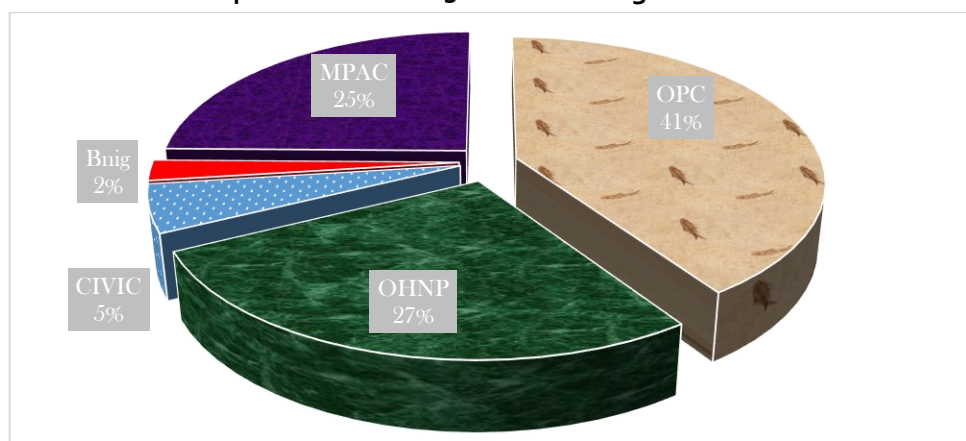


**Figure 3** Percentage distribution of respondents by reason for political participation

**Source:** Computed from the field data by author.

A further analysis of the composition of the first time voters (Figure 3) indicates that while 18% of the first time participants are those who just qualified by age, that is those who were not qualified to vote in other previous election because of age, 82% of the respondents were qualified but chose not to participate. About 29% of the respondents are over 30 years showing that most of the have been qualified to vote before 2011 general election but refused to participate. While this majority chose to participate in 2023, scholars attributed to the effect of political public relation advertising campaign. Hence, we analyzed reason for participation in the table below.

#### Reason for Participation in the 2023 Electioneering Process



**Figure 4** Percentage distribution of respondents by reason for political participation

**Source:** Computed from the field data by author.

Analysis Figure 4 shows that while 41% of the respondents participated actively in the 2023 general election was that a person from their tribe is contesting, about 27% did same because none from their ethnic region has been president before. Hence this shows that

<sup>1</sup> OPC = Because our person is contesting, OHNP = Because our people have never been president, CIVIC = Because I am of age and is my civic right, BNig = Because I am interested in a better Nigeria, MPAC = Because I am moved by the political advertising campaign.



about 67% of the respondent participated for ethic reasons. It is only 5% that participated simply because it is their civic right while only 2% are looking for better Nigeria and about 25% was moved by the public relations political advertising campaign. This is a pointer that the variable of interest is making significant impact in people’s choice to political participation.

**Opinion of Respondents on Public Relations Political Advertisement Campaign**

We sought for the opinion of the respondents concerning the political public relations advertising campaign of the political parties

**Table 3:** Issues from Campaign Strategies

Campaign Strategy	Non- Party Members		Party Members	
	%	Cum	%	Cum
Negative Campaign	28	28	42	42
Issue-based campaign	72	100	58	100
Total	100		100	

**Source:** Author Computation 2024

while about 28% of non-party members who responded to our questionnaire believe in using negative campaign strategy on the political public relations advertising campaign, 72% believes that campaign should be issue based. On the other hand, 42% of party member believes in negative campaign while only 58% believes in issue based campaign. This shows that in all while about 35% support negative campaign, about 65% rooted for issue based public relations political advertising campaign. By implication, majority of the respondents had hatred on negative campaign by the political parties and candidate. The finding while contradicting Kahn and Kennedy (1999) who posited that negative campaign brings the ill of a candidate or political party and motivate voters to vote for the opposition, it gives credence to Antoakis and Olaf (2015), Uduji *et al* (2020) in that emphasis on the negativity never allows for concentration on issues and what candidates or parties have to offer.

**Econometric analysis**

We estimated the effect of public relations political advertisement campaign on three basic determining factors of voter attitude using the logit model proposed in equation 2 and 3. The dependent variable whose effect of political public relation advertisement campaign was predicted are voter registration, turnout and acceptance of electoral outcome. The hypotheses were tested at 5% significant level.

**Table 4:** Analysis of Effect of Public Relations Political Advertising Campaign on Voter Registrations

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% EXP(B)	C.I. for
		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Step 1(a)	Age	-.014	.010	1.730	1	.188	.986	.966	1.007
	Gender(1)	.143	.237	.365	1	.546	1.154	.725	1.838
	HhSilze	-.018	.023	.613	1	.434	.982	.939	1.027
	Alnfra	-.002	.011	.045	1	.832	.998	.977	1.019
	Edu	-.004	.023	.032	1	.859	.996	.951	1.042
	RYin	-.297	.123	5.823	1	.016	.743	.584	.946
	PolAff	.150	.138	4.425	1	.024	1.094	.835	1.434
	PRPAC	1.203	.648	13.497	1	.006	4.525	1.114	1.347
	Constant	1.525	.747	4.167	1	.041	4.595		

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Age, Gender, HhSize, Alnfra, Edu, RYin, PolAff, PRPAC.

**Source:** Author Computation 2024

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict the effect of public relations political advertising campaign on voter registration in south east Nigeria using the variables listed below as predictors the model and estimated thus:

$$\text{Logit (VReg)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PRPAC} + \beta_2 \text{Age} + \beta_3 \text{Gender} + \beta_4 \text{HHSIZE} + \beta_5 \text{Alnfra} + \beta_6 \text{Edu} + \beta_7 \text{RYin} + \beta_8 \text{PolAff}$$

$$\text{Logit (VReg)} = 1.525 + 1.203\text{PRPAC} + (-.014) \text{Age} + 0.143\text{Gender} + (-.018) \text{HHSIZE} + (-.002) \text{Alnfra} + (-.004) \text{Edu} + (-.297) \text{RYin} + .150 \text{PolAff}$$

A test of the full model against a constant only model was found to be statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set reliably distinguished between the “yes” and “no” effect of PRPAC (chi square = 38.179,  $p < .000$  with  $df = 8$ ). Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of .797 indicated a moderately strong relationship between prediction and grouping. Prediction success overall was 89%. The Z- value for the predictor – **Public Relations Political Advertising Campaign (PRPAC)** is 13.497, with an associated p-value of .006. Our significant level was set to 0.05, to this; we rejected the null hypothesis because the p-value is less than 0.05.

Also, EXP (B) value of the Predictor – **PRPAC** is 4.525, this indicates that when political public relations advertising campaign is raised by one unit, the odds ratio is 4.5 times as large and therefore voters are 4.5 more times likely to go and register to vote.

Table 5: Analysis of Effect of Public Relations Political Advertising Campaign on Voter Turnout

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C. I. for EXP(B)	
		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Step 1(a)	AGE	-.025	.010	6.269	1	.012	.976	.957	.995
	Gender(1)	.024	.225	.012	1	.914	1.025	.659	1.592
	HhSilze	-.032	.022	2.161	1	.142	.969	.929	1.011
	Alnfra	-.004	.010	.154	1	.695	.996	.976	1.017
	Edu	.024	.022	1.224	1	.268	1.025	.981	1.070
	RYin	-.241	.119	4.093	1	.043	1.786	.622	.993
	PolAff	.006	.125	.003	1	.042	1.006	.787	1.286
	PRPAC	1.173	.044	11.209	1	.009	5.189	1.090	1.297
	Constant	1.793	.706	6.448	1	.011	6.010		

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: AGE, GENDER, HhSize, Alnfra, Edu, RYin, PolAff, PRPAC.

Source: Author Computation 2024

$$\text{Logit (VTurnout)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PRPAC} + \beta_2 \text{Age} + \beta_3 \text{Gender} + \beta_4 \text{HHSIZE} + \beta_5 \text{Alnfra} + \beta_6 \text{Edu} + \beta_7 \text{RYin} + \beta_8 \text{PolAff}$$

$$\text{Logit (VTurnout)} = 1.793 + 1.173 \text{ PPRAC} + (-.025) \text{ Age} + 0.24 \text{ Gender} + (-.032) \text{ HHSIZE} + (-0.004) \text{ Alnfra} + 0.024 \text{ Edu} + (-.241) \text{ RYin} + 0.006 \text{ PolAff}$$

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict the effect of political public relations advertising campaign on voter turnout in south east Nigeria using the above variables as predictors. A test of the full model against a constant only model was also statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set reliably distinguished between the “yes” and “no” effect of PRPAC (chi square = 44.390, p <.000 with df = 8). Nagelkerke’s R<sup>2</sup> of .817 indicated a strong relationship between prediction and grouping. Prediction success overall was 90%. (92.9% for yes and 87.5% for no. The Z- value for **Public Relations Political Advertising Campaign (PRPAC)** is 11.209, with an associated p-value of .009. Based on the set 5% significant level, we rejected the null hypothesis because the p-value is less than 0.05.

Also, EXP (B) value of the Predictor – **PRPAC** is 5.189, this implies that when political public relations advertising campaign is raised is one unit, the odds ratio is 5.2 times as large and therefore voters are 5.2 more times likely to turnout to vote and protect their votes.

**Table 6:** Analysis of Effect of Public Relations Political Advertising Campaign on Acceptance of Electoral Result

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95.0% EXP(B)	C.I.for
		Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Step 1(a)	AGE	-.030	.010	8.464	1	.004	.970	.951	.990
	GENDER(1)	.100	.237	.178	1	.673	1.105	.695	1.759
	HhSilze	-.015	.023	.417	1	.019	.986	.943	1.030
	Alnfra	.020	.023	.799	1	.007	1.020	.976	1.066
	Edu	.031	.024	1.675	1	.026	1.031	.984	1.080
	RYin	1.871	.125	3.327	1	.038	6.931	.730	1.189
	PolAff	1.108	.131	4.674	1	.025	5.898	.694	1.161
	PRPAC	2.077	.946	5.771	1	.016	2.080	.986	1.182
	Constant	1.974	.823	5.751	1	.013	7.200		

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: AGE, GENDER, HhSize, Alnfra, Edu, RYin, PolAff, PRPAC.

Source: Author Computation 2024

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict the effect of political public relations advertising campaign on voter acceptance of electoral outcome in Southeast Nigeria using the variables listed below as predictors

$$\text{Logit (AEIOut)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PRPAC} + \beta_2 \text{Age} + \beta_3 \text{Gender} + \beta_4 \text{HHSIZE} + \beta_5 \text{Alnfra} + \beta_6 \text{Edu} + \beta_7 \text{RYin} + \beta_8 \text{PolAff}$$

$$\text{Logit (AEIOut)} = 1.974 + 2.077 \text{PRPAC} + (-.030) \text{Age} + 0.1 \text{Gender} + (-.015) \text{HHSIZE} + 0.2 \text{Alnfra} + 0.031 \text{Edu} + 1.871 \text{RYin} + 1.108 \text{PolAff}$$

A test of the full model against a constant only model was statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set reliably distinguished between the "yes" and "no" impact of PRPAC (chi square = 30.788,  $p < .000$  with  $df = 8$ ). Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of .721 indicated a moderately strong relationship between prediction and grouping. Prediction success overall was 82%. The Z- value for the predictor - **Public Relations Political Advertising Campaign (PRPAC)** is 5.771, with an associated p-value of 0.016. Setting our alpha level to 0.05, (5% Significant Level) we rejected the null hypothesis.

EXP (B) value of the Predictor –**PRPAC** is 2.080, this indicates that, when political public relations advertising campaign is raised by one unit, the odds ratio is 2 times as large and therefore, voter are 11 more times likely to accept electoral outcome.

Overall, the result of this study agrees with, Asongu *et al* (2019a), Uduji and Okolo-Obasi (2020), Odionye *et al* (2023) in that the level of exposure of the sampled voters was increased through public relations political advertisement campaign as sponsored by the parties, candidates and even the electoral umpires in carrying out voter education programmes. The effect is buttress in southeast with the odd ration of the logit regression which shows that a unit increase in public relation political advertisement campaign has

about 4.5 times more tendency of making potential voters to come out and register. As seen that even adults over 30 years came out to register as new voters to participate in the 2023 general elections. This finding challenges Asongu *et al* (2020a), Awotayo *et al* (2023) who emphasized voter indifference in Nigeria as an offspring of lack of interest in and dedication to electoral procedures resulting from lack of trust in both the electoral system, its management and political culture. The public relations political advertising campaign leading to the buildup of 2023 general election created significant impact in motivating voters to register turn out and turnout to vote. The outcome confirms the findings of scholars like, Egobueze and Ojirika (2017), Uduji and Okolo-Obasi (2018b), Ezeajughu (2021), Nwanmuoh *et al* (2021a) Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2022), Okolo-obasi *et al* (2023) who on different occasions concurred that political parties are unaware of how much support they could garner if they employed public relations political advertising campaign strategies to elicit voters' loyalty during elections in Nigeria.

The finding this study implies that the dwindling voter turnout in Nigeria can be corrected with serious emphasis on voter education through the cognitive mobilization function of mass media. such emphasis by the parties and candidate must be issue based as seen that majority of the respondents rooted for issue based campaign rather than negative critics of opponents. This finding corroborated the finding of Ahmad *et al.*, (2019), Ibeogu *et al* (2019), Ogundiran, (2020), Nwanmuoh *et al* (2021b) who observed that campaigns attempting to set the agenda to collect votes based on a particular negative message in the hope of putting the opponent in an unfavorable light could instead risk putting their candidates-as negative messengers-on the agenda in place of the negative message.

The findings of this study confirms that the media as public relations tool plays a crucial role in encouraging citizens to participate in the political process if the function of mass media in political advertisement campaigns is focused on providing citizens with relevant information about candidates and policy issues as well as mobilizing citizens to engage in political processes as much as possible. This confirmed with the assertions of Yusufu (2020), Uduji, and Okolo-Obasi (2022) that political ads could influence people's attitudes towards the candidates and ultimately their voting behavior. However, even though the inferential statistics shows that increase in public relations political advertisement campaign has an odd of 2 time more tendency to make voters accept electoral outcome, the outcome of the 2023 general election in Nigeria appears to have disagreed with the findings and have destroyed the confidence built by the candidates and parties during the election. The turnout as announced and the result outcome are not in line with the enthusiasm witnessed during the buildup. Hence the findings of this study shows that it is either that people were not turning out to vote while homogenous result are announced before or that the turnout was suppressed. This finding in relation to the cognitive mobilization theory used in this study has confirmed that Nigerian were highly mobilized in the 2023 general election thereby contradicting the finding of Agba (2007)'s finding that over 53% of the Nigerian population is still illiterate of electoral information. Hence this study asserts that public

relations political advertisement campaign made significant impact in changing the attitude of Nigerians during the general election.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examines the effects of public relations political advertising campaign on voter attitude in south-east geo-political zone of Nigeria. The study has a high level of external validity because it is a survey study in a real-world election setting. The study concludes that public relation political advertisement campaign through the mass media is very effective strategy of informing the masses about political activities and influencing attitude toward participating in elections. The cognitive motivation theory used in this study confirmed this conclusion because on the basis of this theory, efficient use of public relations political advertisement campaign during electioneering programme undoubtedly increases voter attitude in the areas of voter registration and voter turnout as was seen in 2023 general election in the south-eastern Nigeria.

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it is recommended that during the buildup of any general election process, media gatekeepers should ensure that public relations political advertisement campaign are based on issue and not negative campaign. Also, the electoral umpires must need to at all level further intensify political education and ensure that the outcome of the process does not damage the changed attitude build during the campaign process.

### Recommendations for Further Studies

Based on the findings of this study, several additional directions are worth pursuing. First, future research could test mediation and treat attitudes towards political ads as mediating variables to assess ad contents and attitudes towards the brand with respect to important political outcomes such as vote choice, candidate preference, political knowledge, and voter mobilization.

In particular, future research could further assess the effects of other types of attitudes besides negative, i.e, truthfulness and entertainment, which might also produce mediating effects. Finally, based on the points explored in this paper in regard to the antecedents and consequences of attitudes towards public relations political advertising campaign, future research could test a path model links all the relevant constructs and use it to assess any causal relationships among them.

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