

Public Relations and Voter Awareness in Cross River State Elections

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of public relations strategies on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State. Specifically, it investigated how voter education programmes, social media campaigns, stakeholder collaboration, and public service announcements influence voters' knowledge and understanding of electoral procedures. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 344 registered voters in selected local government areas using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were employed for data analysis and hypothesis testing. The results revealed that all four public relations strategies significantly and positively affected voters' awareness, with public service announcements emerging as the most influential predictor, followed by stakeholder collaboration, voter education programmes, and social media campaigns. These findings highlight the critical role of strategic communication in shaping electoral awareness in the Nigerian context. The study concludes that well-coordinated and multi-channel public relations strategies are essential for fostering an informed electorate. It contributes to the literature by demonstrating the relative effectiveness of different communication tools in enhancing voter awareness in subnational electoral settings. The study recommends that electoral management bodies strengthen their use of integrated communication approaches to deepen public understanding of the electoral process.

Keywords: Public Relations, Voters' Awareness, Electoral Campaigns, Electoral Process, Voter Sensitization Campaign, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Introduction

In democratic systems of government, the imperatives of a politically-informed citizenry cannot be overemphasized. This is because consistent civic participation is central to the growth and stability of nations (Boudreau *et al.*, 2019); and an essential requirement for having an informed citizenry is voters' awareness of the electoral process (Hannon, 2022). Moreover, Willeck and Mendelberg (2022) observed that in democratic societies where voters are informed, political leaders tend to be transparent about their activities and policies. Leaders' secret decisions or unethical practices come out through a properly functioning democratic system. This is why Findlow (2019) argued that a properly functioning democracy outfitted with awareness amongst the voters creates a two-way street to put pressure on politicians and representatives to act transparently in the interests of the citizens. Recognizing the imperatives of an informed citizenry in democratic

societies, scholars have advocated for the application of public communication strategies as a way of improving voters' awareness of electoral systems (Al-Fawzan *et al.*, 2019; El-Sayed *et al.*, 2025; Mthembu & Sullivan, 2022).

In several extant studies, public relations has been identified as an important communication strategy with the potential of facilitating voter education and awareness creation (Al-Sabah *et al.*, 2025; Bouzid *et al.*, 2021; Abdel-Maksoud *et al.*, 2022). In the political context, public relations (PR) entails the strategic communication and engagement efforts used by politicians, political parties, or government entities to manage and shape their public image, enhance their reputation, and influence public opinion on political issues within or outside a state (Mthembu & Sullivan, 2022). Similarly, Lim and Tan (2020) observed that in an ever-evolving landscape of politics, the utilization of public relations (PR) strategies has gained remarkable prominence. Politicians and political organizations are increasingly turning to PR campaigns to shape public perceptions, manage their image, and effectively communicate their messages. This shift is often driven by media landscape evolution (Kamara, 2025). The rapid transformation of the media landscape, with the proliferation of digital platforms and social media, has necessitated a shift in political communication.

Political organizations now engage with audiences across multiple channels, and PR tactics provide the means to adapt to this evolving environment (Girma & Mekonnen, 2021). In Nigeria, the diverse socio-cultural landscape demands communication strategies that can resonate with a wide array of audiences (Nwanmuoh *et al.*, 2021). PR techniques, such as targeted messaging and culturally sensitive campaigns, allow political organizations to engage with various demographic groups. Using several PR platforms, political and non-governmental organizations in Nigeria disseminate voter-education campaigns prior to general elections to enlighten voters of the electoral process. In the recently-concluded 2023 General Elections in Nigeria, voter enlightenment campaigns were executed using several PR tools. This study was therefore carried out to determine the effects of voter education programme, social media campaign, stakeholder collaboration, and public service announcement on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State.

Research rationale

A preliminary scoping review of relevant extant studies has revealed that even though studies exist on political public relations in the Nigerian electoral system, scholars have not specifically examined the influence of political public relations on voters' awareness of the Nigerian electoral process. The vast majority of extant relevant studies in Nigeria were limited to voter registration exercise (Okpara, 2022); electoral fraud (Chiakaan *et al.*, 2021); voters' choice of candidates (Rasheed, 2021); public acceptance of political campaigns (Oyero *et al.*, 2016); effectiveness of political campaigns (Basil & Bassey, 2016; Ngwoke, 2016); and electoral crises (Ngusha & Chile, 2015). It was also observed that existing Nigerian studies did not clearly identify the specific political public relations strategies being tested in their investigations (Chiakaan *et al.*, 2021; Basil & Bassey, 2016; Ngusha & Chile,

2015; Ngwoke, 2016). This contributed to the inability of extant studies to precisely demonstrate the causality between political public relations and voters' awareness of the electoral process in Nigeria.

However, widening the scope of the literature search beyond Nigerian has revealed that scholars in other climes have explored the application of political public relations strategies in their political systems. Based on the studies of Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2019); Bouzid *et al.* (2021); El-Sayed *et al.* (2025); Mthembu and Sullivan (2022), political public relation variables, namely: voter education programme, social media campaign, public service announcement, and stakeholder collaboration, have been adopted for the study. This study was therefore conducted to determine the effects of voter education programme, social media campaign, public service announcement, and stakeholder collaboration on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State. Such a study is necessary to bridge the knowledge gap that exists in extant literature and generate insights that demonstrate the effectiveness of public relations strategies at improving voters' awareness in the Nigerian political system.

Literature Review

The Nigerian electoral process

The Nigerian electoral process comprises various stages, which begins with the registration of voters and wraps up with the declaration of winners (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2025). The electoral system is organized such that it operates within strict timelines, ensuring that the process is concluded within a reasonable period. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the body responsible for organizing, conducting, and supervising elections in Nigeria. According to section 14(1) of the Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), the INEC is responsible for (among other responsibilities) the conduct of national and state elections into federal and state offices (Iyioha & Ekpo, 2019). In carrying out this weighty duty, the INEC has established a set of guidelines and measures to ensure that the electoral process is free, fair, and credible. These guidelines include the use of electronic voting machines, voter identification and authentication, manual verification of results by agents of political parties in polling units, and the establishment of collation centers across the country (Ekwueme & Nduka, 2021). Also, Iheka and Chilaka (2025) maintained that the Nigerian electoral system has contributed immensely to the country's democratic growth. Since the civilian transition in 1999, several general elections have been held, with each election improving on the previous one in terms of transparency and credibility.

In 2015, for example, the Nigerian elections were adjudged to be the most credible in the country's democratic history (Aluko & Adebajo, 2023). This accomplishment was largely due to the introduction of various innovations like the Permanent Voter's Card, the use of electronic card readers to authenticate voters, and the introduction of a biometric system to ensure that voters' data was stored electronically. However, the Nigerian electoral process is not without its challenges. Some of the challenges include voter apathy,

inadequate funding for the INEC, political interference, the failure of political parties to adhere to internal democracy, and electoral violence (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2025). Most notoriously, the 2023 general elections in Nigeria may have just earned the title of the most controversial yet in the history of elections in the country (Ogunleye & Abubakar, 2023). While the elections are finally over and citizens begin to ease into the realization that they now have new leaders, some aggrieved contenders have brought petitions before the appropriate election tribunals. Some of the grounds or reasons for the petitions include non-compliance with the Constitution and the Electoral Act 2022; corrupt practices, and that the election was characterized by violence, voter profiling and intimidation (Akume & Adibe, 2023). In addition, there were reports of voter intimidation and harassment during the 2023 general elections (Okoli & Nwachukwu, 2023). Similarly, there were instances of voter profiling especially during the gubernatorial and houses of assembly elections in various states with voters being prevented from voting because they look like a certain tribe. Cases of inducement and bribery were also recorded as voters were induced (given money or gifts) to vote against their preferred choices (Akume & Adibe, 2023).

Political public relations

Political public relations refer to the management of communication between an individual or organization engaged in politics and its various publics (Holtzhausen *et al.*, 2020). This includes shaping and disseminating messages to influence public opinion, managing media relations, conducting research to better understand public attitudes, and developing strategies to maintain a positive image. Lilleker and Koc-michalska (2025) describe political public relations as a strategic function which integrates communication and political goals and reaches diverse audiences with distinct messages in a complex environment. This definition emphasizes the complexity of political public relations, which involves managing multiple stakeholders and delivering tailored messages to different audiences.

In the views of Johnston and Noakes (2020), political public relations is the art and science of political communication, the strategic management of information and image to achieve political objectives and influence the environment. This definition highlights the role of political public relations in achieving political objectives, such as winning elections, passing legislation, or shaping public policy. According to Lee and Ki (2019), political public relations is increasingly popular among politicians and political organizations for several reasons. First, traditional forms of political communication, such as television and print advertisements, have become less effective in reaching and engaging audiences. Political leaders are turning to social media, online forums, and other digital channels to reach voters where they are spending their time and attention (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 2025). Also, the media environment has become more fragmented and polarized, making it harder for politicians to communicate their messages to broad audiences (Ribeiro & Mielniczuk, 2025). Through targeted public relations campaigns and grassroots organizing efforts, political actors can more effectively engage with supporters and mobilize them to take action. In

addition, the stakes of political communication have never been higher (Tresch & Schweitzer, 2021).

Voter education programme and voters' awareness

Voter education programme refers to the process of informing citizens about the voting process and their right to vote. It involves raising awareness of electoral laws, procedures, and mechanisms, as well as building citizens' knowledge of political parties and candidates (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2019). Similarly, Sharma *et al.* (2022) maintained that voter education programmes can build citizens' understanding of electoral laws, procedures, and mechanisms. It enables voters to understand the legal framework surrounding elections, including how to vote, and what happens after the vote is cast. Such information can improve their confidence in the electoral process, and they can make informed choices concerning their preferred candidates. In addition, Sjöblom (2019) observed that voter education programmes provide citizens with vital information that enables them to differentiate between political issues and select suitable candidates. By effectively informing citizens of the various political parties and their candidates, voters can make informed decisions and elect based on their understanding of the candidate's policies. Furthermore, Wu *et al.* (2021) argued that voter education programmes serve as a platform for dialogue between citizens and election bodies. Through these programs, there is an exchange of vital information between voters and electoral bodies. Such interactions enable the citizens to seek clarity on issues like voter registration, voting procedures, among others. Through these programmes, voters gain a better understanding of the legal framework surrounding elections, political parties and their candidates, and the opportunity to engage in dialogue with electoral bodies (Abdullah & Daud, 2019). The foregoing viewpoint suggests that voter education programmes have the capacity to facilitate improvements in voters' awareness of political issues, including the electoral process. This viewpoint is backed by the study of Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2019), which revealed that voter education had a significant positive effect on voters' awareness of political affairs in Jordan. The viewpoints also align with the study of Bouzid *et al.* (2021), which revealed that voter education programme had a significant positive impact on voters' sensitization initiatives in Algeria. On this note, the following hypothesis is proposed for this study:

H₁: Voter education programme has a significant effect on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State.

Social media campaign and voters' awareness

A social media campaign in politics is the use of social media tools and platforms to mobilize and engage citizens during political campaigning (Cheong & Yeoh, 2020). The aim is to increase awareness, educate and engage voters, influence public opinion, and drive political decisions. Social media campaigns in politics can be used to reach a large number of people at a low cost and can be targeted at specific groups based on demographic, geographic, and psychographic factors. In the views of Kim and Schulz (2025), political social media

campaigns can effectively improve voters' awareness of political issues through a range of strategies. Specifically, by using social media platforms to disseminate information on political issues, candidates can reach a wide audience and increase public knowledge of political issues. This may include posting updates on campaign promises, party policies, and information on important issues such as healthcare, education, and national security. Also, Kim and Lee (2021) argued that social media campaigns can generate engagement and discussion among voters, encouraging them to share their opinions and participate in the political process. This can help to raise awareness of political issues and encourage increased voter turnout. Similarly, López-Navas and García-Silva (2025) observed that political social media campaigns can generate momentum and interest in the electoral process, encouraging more individuals to register to vote and encouraging existing voters to participate in the election. Like the foregoing argument, Brown and Smith (2019) submitted that political social media campaigns can improve voters' awareness of political issues by providing them with more information and context on the election, political candidates, and important issues. By offering information on candidates and policies, social media campaigns can help to clarify political issues, debate, and controversies, which may increase voters' knowledge of the political process (Chen *et al.*, 2021). The foregoing viewpoint suggests that social media campaigns have the capacity to facilitate improvements in voters' awareness of political issues, including the electoral process. This viewpoint is backed by the study of Al-Sabah *et al.* (2025), which revealed that social media campaign had a significant positive impact on electorate's awareness of political events in Kuwait. The viewpoints also align with the study of Mthembu and Sullivan (2022), which revealed that social media campaign had a significant positive relationship with black voters' awareness of the South African electoral system. On this note, the following hypothesis is proposed for this study:

H₂: Social media campaign has a significant effect on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State.

Stakeholder collaboration and voters' awareness

Stake collaboration in politics refers to various forms of interaction, cooperation, and communication between key actors, including government institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, and citizens (Jong *et al.*, 2020). Such collaboration is aimed at addressing complex political issues and achieving collective goals, such as promoting democracy, social justice, and sustainable development. Ansell and Gash (2025) viewed stakeholder collaboration in politics as the active involvement of diverse stakeholders in the political decision-making process, including citizens, interest groups, political leaders, and government officials. Gallicano and Jones (2025) also argued that stakeholder collaboration can facilitate information-sharing and public education campaigns on electoral processes, including voter registration, voting procedures, and candidate selection. Political parties and civic groups can collaborate to organize voter education forums, debates, and information sessions, where voters can learn about their

rights and responsibilities, and the importance of participation in the electoral process. This is because when stakeholders work collaboratively, they are more likely to build consensus around shared values and goals, which can encourage greater participation in the political process (Sang & Reber, 2023). This, in turn, can increase voter awareness of the issues at stake and encourage greater engagement with the electoral process. The foregoing viewpoint suggests that stakeholder collaborations have the capacity to facilitate improvements in voters' awareness of political issues, including the electoral process. This viewpoint is backed by the study of Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2019), which revealed that stakeholder collaboration had a significant positive effect on voters' awareness of political affairs in Jordan. The viewpoint also aligns with the study of Abdel-Maksoud *et al.* (2022), which revealed that stakeholder collaboration had a significant influence on voters' knowledge of the electoral system in Pakistan. On this note, the following hypothesis is proposed for this study:

H₃: Stakeholder collaboration has a significant effect on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State.

Public service announcement and voters' awareness

A public service announcement in politics is a persuasive message aimed at informing, educating, or mobilizing the public about political issues, candidates, or events through various media platforms (Buckley & Kaid, 2022). Vavreck (2012) defines political public service announcements as communication messages used by political organizations to inform the public about specific issues, typically distributed via mass media such as television, radio, and social media. In electoral periods, Ribeiro and Mielniczuk (2025) argued that political public service announcements can help raise awareness of specific political issues. They can highlight key factors such as economic policy, healthcare, immigration, education, and environmental issues. By providing voters with clear and concise information on current political issues, these announcements can help voters understand the impact of policies on their lives and encourage civic engagement. Furthermore, Tresch and Schweitzer (2021) added that political public service announcements can showcase the importance of participating in the political process. They can encourage individuals to get involved in political rallies and events, express their views on social media, and most essentially cast their ballots. By emphasizing the impact of voter participation, these announcements can foster a sense of civic responsibility and encourage individuals to become more engaged in the political process (Sharma *et al.*, 2022). The foregoing viewpoint suggests that public service announcements have the capacity to facilitate improvements in voters' awareness of political issues, including the electoral process. This viewpoint is backed by the study of El-Sayed *et al.* (2025), which revealed that public service announcement had a significant positive relationship with the awareness of young voters in Egypt. The viewpoint is also backed by the study of Al-Sabah *et al.* (2025), which revealed that public service announcement had a significant positive impact on

electorate's awareness of political events in Kuwait. On this note, the following hypothesis is proposed for this study:

H₄: Public service announcement has a significant effect on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State.

Empirical studies and conceptual model

This unit summarizes previous research relevant to the present study in order to identify areas where further research can be done. A study by Okpara (2022) examined the role of mass media in improving public awareness and participation in the 2022 voter registration exercise in Enugu metropolis of Enugu State, Nigeria. Primary data were obtained from 396 registered voters in Enugu using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. The findings revealed that mass media contributed significantly in creating awareness for public participation in the 2022 voter registration in Enugu state, Nigeria. However, this study lacked rigorous inferential test of hypotheses as only descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. As such, the study does not specifically demonstrate the causality between political PR strategies and voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State. Another study by Chiakaan *et al.* (2021) centered on identifying political public relations approaches that can be applied by the government and other bodies responsible for conducting elections in Nigeria to mitigate and eliminate vote buying. The study adopted a qualitative methodology which relied on collection and analysis of secondary data. The results of the study revealed that vote buying has become synonymous with elections in Nigeria. It is facilitated by poverty, lack of education, high cost of buying forms to contest elections, and many others. However, the limitation of this study is that it did not specifically identify political PR variables tested. It was also restricted to vote-buying as the dependent variable, rather than voters' awareness.

Similarly, Rasheed's (2021) study examined the influence of political public relations on voters' choice of candidates in the 2025 governorship election in Osun State, Nigeria. The study obtained data for secondary data sources. The data were subjected to qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed that political public relations significantly influenced voters' choice of candidates in the 2025 governorship election in Osun, Nigeria. However, the limitation of this study is that it was restricted to voters' choice of candidates as the dependent variable. In another study, Oyero *et al.* (2016) focused on the influence of political rally on public acceptance of APC presidential campaign in Lagos State. In this study, primary data were obtained from 389 voters in Lagos State using a structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics.

The findings revealed that political rally is an effective political public relations strategy that shapes electorates attitude and their choice of candidate. However, the limitation of the study is that it was limited to political rally as the independent variable, and it lacked rigorous inferential test of hypotheses as only descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. The study also was limited to public acceptance of political candidates as the dependent variable, rather than voters' awareness of electoral processes.

Furthermore, Basil and Bassey (2016) examined the effect of marketing communication tools on the effectiveness of political campaign programs in Nigeria. Primary data were obtained from 200 respondents in Cross River State using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and simple regression were used for data analysis and hypotheses testing respectively. The results of the study showed that public relations strategy significantly enhanced the effectiveness of political campaign programs in Nigeria. However, the limitation of this study is that it does not identify the specific political PR strategy studied, and it was limited to effectiveness of political campaigns as dependent variable, rather than voters' awareness of electoral processes. In another study, Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2019) examined the effects of political public relations (stakeholder collaboration and voter education) on voters' awareness of political affairs in Jordan. An online questionnaire survey was used to obtain primary data from 421 voters in Amman, Jordan. The data were descriptively analyzed and the hypotheses were tested using simple regression. The findings indicate that stakeholder collaboration and voter education had a significant positive effect on voters' awareness of political affairs in Jordan. However, the study was restricted to the Jordanian political system, with no reference to the Nigerian political process, particularly as it pertains to voters in Cross River State.

El-Sayed *et al.* (2025) also examined the relationship between political public relations (social media campaign and public service announcement) and the awareness of young voters in Egypt. The study obtained primary data from 529 first-time voters in Egypt using a structured questionnaire. Using Pearson's product moment correlation analysis, the hypotheses of the study were tested statistically. The findings revealed that political public relations (social media campaign and public service announcement) had a significant positive relationship with the awareness of young voters in Egypt. However, the limitation of this study is that it was restricted to the Egyptian political system, with no reference to the Nigerian political process, particularly as it pertains to voters in Cross River State. Another study by Bouzid *et al.* (2021) examined the impact of public relations practices (voter education programme and stakeholder collaboration) on voters' sensitization initiatives in Algeria. The study relied on secondary data and primary data obtained through a structured questionnaire survey on 237 voters in Algeria. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis while hypotheses testing was done using Structural Equation Modeling. The findings revealed that voter education programme and stakeholder collaboration had significant positive impacts on voters' sensitization initiatives in Algeria. However, the limitation of this study is that it was restricted to the Algerian political system, with no reference to the Nigerian political process, particularly as it pertains to voters in Cross River State.

In another study, Al-Sabah *et al.* (2025) examined the effects of public relations strategies (social media campaign and public service announcement) on electorate's awareness of political events in Kuwait. The study used a structured questionnaire to obtain primary data from 146 young voters in Kuwait. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics while hypotheses testing was done using regression analysis. The findings of the study revealed

that social media campaign and public service announcement had significant positive impacts on electorate's awareness of political events in Kuwait. Similarly, Mthembu and Sullivan (2022) explored the relationship between political public relations (social media campaign and public service announcement) and black voters' awareness of the South African electoral system. The study used a combination of online questionnaire and self-administered questionnaire to obtain primary data from 391 black voters in Pretoria, South Africa. Using descriptive statistics and Pearson's product moment correlation, the data obtained were statistically analyzed. The findings of the study revealed that social media campaign and public service announcement had significant positive relationships with black voters' awareness of the South African electoral system. In addition, Abdel-Maksoud *et al.* (2022) examined the nexus between political public relations (social media campaign and stakeholder collaboration) and voters' knowledge of the electoral system in Pakistan. The study used an online structured questionnaire survey to obtain primary data from 528 registered voters in Islamabad, Pakistan. Structural Equation Modeling was adopted to test the hypotheses developed. The findings revealed that social media campaign and stakeholder collaboration had significant influences on voters' knowledge of the electoral system in Pakistan.

From scholarly studies reviewed, a conceptual model was developed and tested to guide this investigation. The independent variable (public relations strategies) was disintegrated into parameters informed by extant relevant studies. These parameters included voter education programme, social media campaign, stakeholder collaboration and public service announcement (Al-Fawzan *et al.*, 2019; Bouzid *et al.*, 2021; El-Sayed *et al.*, 2025; Mthembu & Sullivan, 2022; Abdel-Maksoud *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, the dependent variable (voters' awareness of electoral process) was measured through the following adapted proxies: knowledge of voting rights, awareness of voter registration procedure, knowledge of political parties, knowledge of voting process, and knowledge of vote result collation (Boulianne, 2016; Okpara, 2022). In light of existing empirical evidence by previous researchers, this study hypothesized that public relations had some sort of relationship with voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State. To demonstrate this hypothesized relationship, a conceptual model in FIG. 1 was adapted from existing studies to suit the context of the present study.

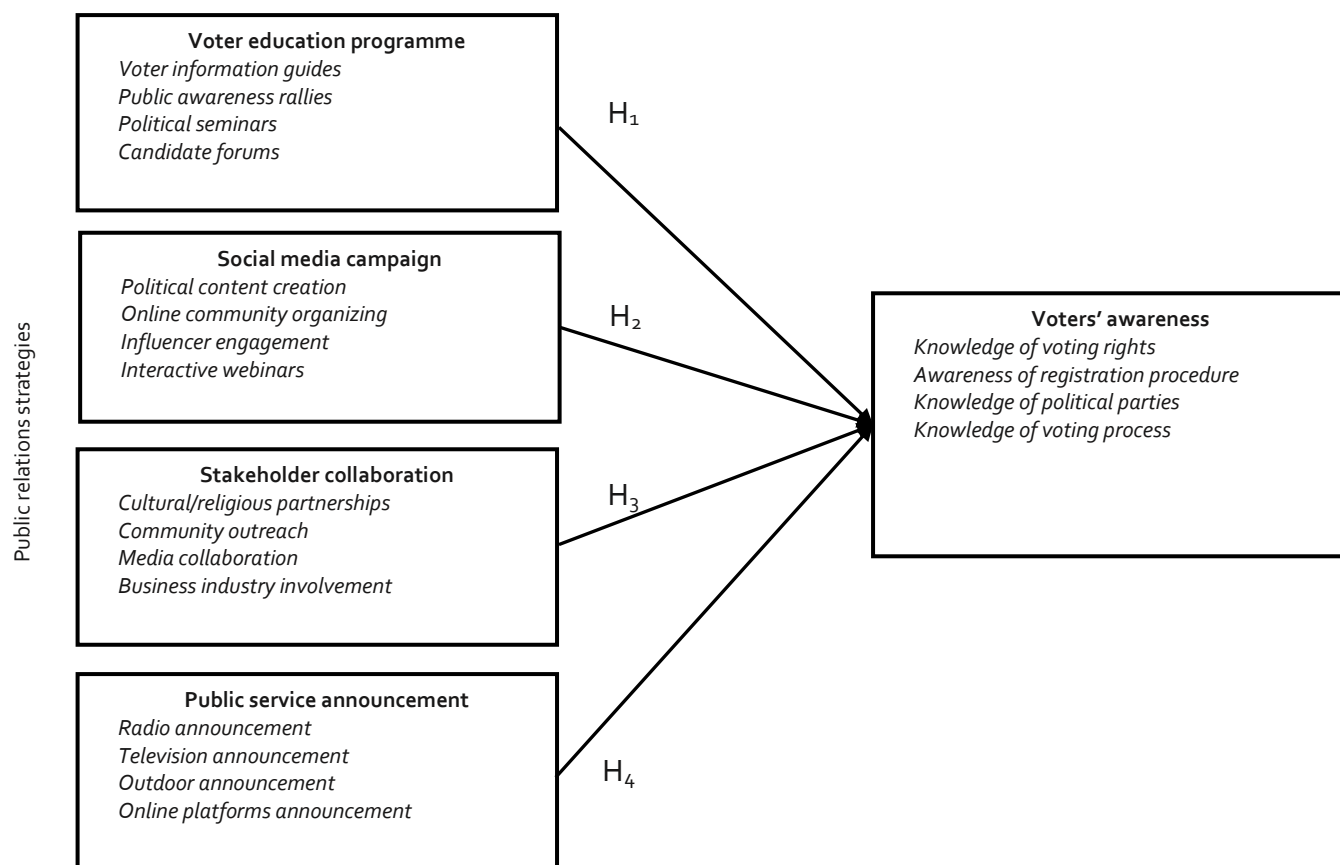


FIG. 1: Conceptual model of the study

Source: Parameters of independent variable adapted from Al-Fawzan *et al.* (2019); Bouzid *et al.* (2021); El-Sayed *et al.* (2025); Mthembu and Sullivan (2022); Abdel-Maksoud *et al.* (2022). Parameters of dependent variable adapted from Boulianne (2016); Okpara (2022).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in participatory communication theory, propounded by Jankowski and Prehn (2002). The theory critiques traditional top-down, sender–receiver models of communication, which treat audiences as passive recipients of information. Instead, it emphasizes communication as a dialogic and reciprocal process, where individuals actively participate in meaning-making, thereby fostering empowerment and shared understanding (Jankowski & Prehn, 2002; Servaes, 2008). Participatory communication involves platforms that enable interaction, feedback, and collaboration between message senders and receivers, ultimately strengthening knowledge exchange and collective agency. This theoretical perspective provides a useful lens for understanding how different public relations strategies influence voters' awareness of the electoral process. Voter education programmes reflect participatory principles by engaging communities through forums, seminars, and information sessions that allow two-way interaction between electoral bodies and citizens. Such initiatives enable voters to clarify doubts and co-construct knowledge, rather than passively absorb information.

Social media campaigns exemplify digital participation, allowing voters to comment, share, and interact with electoral content in real time, thereby transforming communication from a unidirectional broadcast into a participatory dialogue. Stakeholder collaboration operationalizes participatory communication by involving diverse groups, such as community leaders, religious institutions, and civil society organisations, in disseminating electoral information, creating multiple feedback loops that make communication more culturally grounded and credible. Finally, public service announcements (PSAs), though traditionally top-down, can adopt participatory principles when integrated with interactive platforms such as community discussions, call-in radio programmes, or online forums where citizens can respond, question, and engage with the content. Thus, participatory communication theory helps explain why these strategies are expected to enhance voters' awareness. When communication initiatives are dialogic, inclusive, and co-constructed, they build trust, increase comprehension, and stimulate active civic engagement, which are essential for fostering electoral awareness in democratic contexts such as Cross River State.

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. Primary data were collected at a single point in time from voters in Cross River State using a structured questionnaire. The study population comprised all accredited voters who participated in the 2023 general elections in Cross River State, estimated at 444,880 across the 18 local government areas (Asare, 2023). Using the Taro Yamane formula, a sample size of 400 respondents was determined. A combined cluster random and convenience sampling approach was employed to enhance representativeness and feasibility. First, cluster random sampling was used to group the population by local government areas, after which specific clusters were randomly selected to ensure geographical spread. Within each selected cluster, convenience sampling was applied to identify readily available and willing respondents, which was considered appropriate given the dispersed population and logistical constraints of electoral communities. Instrument validity and reliability were carefully ensured. Content validity was established through expert review by three academics and two practitioners in political communication, who assessed the questionnaire items for relevance, clarity, and alignment with the study variables. Reliability was confirmed through a pilot test involving 30 voters, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs exceeding 0.70 (see Table 1), indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Ethical considerations were duly observed. The study received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Administration and Management Sciences, University of Calabar, Nigeria. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the data collection process.

TABLE 1

Reliability results

SN	Variables	No. of items	Alpha coefficients
1	Voter education programme	4	.768
2	Social media campaign	4	.742
3	Stakeholder collaboration	4	.812
4	Public service announcement	4	.826
5	Voters' awareness	5	.774
		21	

Source: Researcher's analysis via SPSS (2025)

After field administration of questionnaire copies, the data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics while the hypotheses of the study were tested using multiple regression through the following model:

$$VA = a + \beta_1 VEP + \beta_2 SMCAM + \beta_3 SHCOL + \beta_4 PSAN + e$$

Where:

VA = Voters' awareness

a = The intercept (or constant)

$\beta_1 VEP$ = Coefficient of voter education programme

$\beta_2 SMCAM$ = Coefficient of social media campaign

$\beta_3 SHCOL$ = Coefficient of stakeholder collaboration

$\beta_4 PSAN$ = Coefficient of public service announcement

e = Error margin (5 percent)

Analysis and Discussion

During the questionnaire survey, a total of 400 questionnaire copies were administered to accredited voters in Cross River State. Out of the 400 questionnaire copies administered, 344 copies (or 86.0 percent) were successfully retrieved, while 56 copies (or 14.0 percent) were not returned, therefore resulting in a total response rate of 86.0 percent. With this data, the null hypotheses developed for the study were tested statistically with the aid of multiple linear regression in the SPSS software. The main reason for testing the null hypothesis instead of the alternative is rooted in the principle of falsifiability, a key concept in the scientific method. Falsifiability implies that a scientific hypothesis must be testable and potentially disprovable based on empirical evidence.

H₀: Voter education programme has no significant effect on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State.

H₀: Social media campaign has no significant effect on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State.

H₀: Stakeholder collaboration has no significant effect on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State.

H₀: Public service announcement has no significant effect on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State.

Predictors: Voter education programme, social media campaign, stakeholder collaboration and public service announcement

Outcome: Voters' awareness

Decision rule: The null hypothesis is rejected when the P-value is below 0.05 ($p < .05$). Conversely, if the P-value is above 0.05 ($p > .05$), the null hypothesis is accepted.

TABLE 2

Model summary of the effect of public relations strategies on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.606 ^a	.367	.359	.44424

a. Predictors: (Constant), Voter education programme, social media campaign, stakeholder collaboration and public service announcement

b. Dependent Variable: Voters' awareness

Source: Researcher's analysis via SPSS (2025)

TABLE 3

ANOVA^a of the effect of public relations strategies on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	38.739	4	9.685	49.074	.000 ^b
	Residual	66.902	339	.197		
	Total	105.641	343			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Voter education programme, social media campaign, stakeholder collaboration and public service announcement

b. Dependent Variable: Voters' awareness

Source: Researcher's analysis via SPSS (2025)

TABLE 4

Coefficients^a of the effect of public relations strategies on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.517	.140		10.807	.000
	Voter education programme	.155	.033	.245	4.654	.000
	Social media campaign	.124	.045	.182	2.747	.006
	Stakeholder collaboration	.151	.039	.265	3.909	.000
	Public service announcement	.186	.036	.280	5.129	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Voters' awareness

Source: Researcher's analysis via SPSS (2025)

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the key variables, showing relatively high mean scores across all public relations strategies, suggesting that respondents were broadly exposed to voter education programmes, social media campaigns, stakeholder collaborations, and public service announcements during the electoral process. Tables 2, 3, and 4 summarise the results of the multiple regression analysis. Table 2 shows a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.606, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship between public relations strategies and voters' awareness of the electoral process. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.367 suggests that the four strategies collectively explain approximately 36.7% of the variation in voters' awareness, with the remaining 63.3% attributable to other factors such as political interest, media literacy, and prior civic engagement. This reflects moderate explanatory power, indicating that while PR strategies are important, they operate alongside other influences in shaping electoral awareness.

The F-statistic ($F = 49.074$, $p < 0.001$) in Table 3 confirms that the overall model is statistically significant. Table 4 further reveals the relative contributions of each strategy. Public service announcements emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.280$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that structured, wide-reaching announcements play a central role in informing the electorate. Stakeholder collaboration ($\beta = 0.265$, $p < 0.001$) also showed substantial impact, indicating that partnerships with community and institutional actors amplify message credibility and reach. Voter education programmes and social media campaigns also had positive and significant effects ($\beta = 0.231$ and $\beta = 0.182$, respectively), though of smaller magnitude. In practical terms, these results imply that combining traditional mass communication (public service announcements) with community-based engagement (stakeholder collaboration) is particularly effective in raising electoral awareness. Social media and voter education initiatives, while important, may require more targeted approaches to achieve similar impact. Overall, the findings affirm that coordinated public relations strategies significantly enhance voters' understanding of electoral processes in Cross River State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that public relations strategies, namely voter education programmes, social media campaigns, stakeholder collaboration, and public service announcements, significantly and positively influence voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State. These results can be effectively interpreted through participatory communication theory (Jankowski & Prehn, 2002), which highlights the role of dialogue, reciprocity, and shared meaning-making in enhancing communication outcomes. According to this theory, communication processes that actively involve audiences as contributors, not just recipients, generate empowerment, ownership, and more sustainable behavioural outcomes (Servaes, 2008). Each of the strategies examined in this study reflects, to varying degrees, these participatory principles.

Voter education programmes were found to significantly increase voters' awareness of the electoral process, aligning with findings from Al-Fawzan et al. (2019) in Jordan and Bouzid

et al. (2021) in Algeria, both of which showed that structured voter education significantly improved public understanding of political processes. In both contexts, as in Nigeria, voter education created interactive spaces (through workshops, community meetings, and printed guides), where citizens could discuss, question, and internalise electoral information. From a participatory communication perspective, these programmes move beyond top-down transmission by enabling voters to co-construct meaning in ways that resonate with their local realities. In the Nigerian setting, voter education appears to play a similar role, fostering informed engagement through face-to-face sensitisation drives, INEC training sessions, and community-based awareness forums.

Social media campaigns also had a statistically significant positive effect, supporting the findings of Al-Sabah et al. (2025) in Kuwait and Mthembu and Sullivan (2022) in South Africa, which demonstrated the capacity of social media to enhance voters' awareness of political events and electoral systems. These platforms inherently support two-way interaction (through comment sections, live sessions, and direct messaging); reflecting the participatory model's dialogic ethos. However, in this study, social media emerged as the least influential predictor among the four strategies. This contrasts somewhat with Kuwait and South Africa, where social media played a more prominent role. A plausible explanation is the digital divide and varying levels of trust in online political content in Nigeria. While social media theoretically provides participatory spaces, infrastructural limitations, uneven internet penetration, and scepticism toward online information may reduce its practical effectiveness in reaching large segments of the electorate.

Stakeholder collaboration was another strong predictor of voter awareness, closely following public service announcements. This finding is consistent with the results of Al-Fawzan et al. (2019) and Abdel-Maksoud et al. (2022), which showed that multi-actor collaboration in Jordan and Pakistan significantly improved voters' knowledge of political processes. The participatory communication framework explains this effect well: when political parties, electoral commissions, civil society organisations, community leaders, and religious groups jointly engage in dialogue and co-create messages, the information disseminated gains legitimacy and cultural resonance. In Nigeria, where communal structures play a central role in shaping public opinion, stakeholder collaboration leverages trusted intermediaries to translate electoral information into locally meaningful terms. This collective involvement enhances message penetration, reinforces credibility, and encourages widespread community engagement.

Public service announcements (PSAs) were the most influential strategy in this study. This finding aligns with El-Sayed et al. (2025) in Egypt and Al-Sabah et al. (2025) in Kuwait, both of which found PSAs to be highly effective tools for raising awareness among broad population groups. While PSAs are traditionally one-directional, their mass reach through radio, television, and community broadcast systems in Nigeria allows them to function as triggers for subsequent participatory discussions. For example, PSAs announcing registration deadlines or explaining voting procedures often prompt conversations within families, workplaces, and community forums, thereby indirectly supporting the

participatory communication process. The strong performance of PSAs relative to social media campaigns also reflects contextual realities: in many parts of Cross River State, traditional mass media remains the most trusted and accessible source of public information.

Essentially, these findings reflect global communication patterns while also revealing context-specific dynamics. As observed in Jordan (Al-Fawzan et al., 2019), Algeria (Bouzid et al., 2021), Egypt (El-Sayed et al., 2025), Kuwait (Al-Sabah et al., 2025), Pakistan (Abdel-Maksoud et al., 2022), and South Africa (Mthembu & Sullivan, 2022), voter education and multi-channel communication strategies are critical for improving electoral awareness. However, the Nigerian results underscore the continued centrality of traditional media and communal structures, which, when integrated with participatory approaches, yield the most substantial impact. While digital platforms are growing in importance globally, their relative effect in this study suggests that effective electoral communication in Nigeria currently relies more heavily on mass media amplification and local stakeholder networks, complemented by (but not dominated by) online channels.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the influence of public relations strategies on voters' awareness of the electoral process in Cross River State, with a focus on voter education programmes, social media campaigns, stakeholder collaboration, and public service announcements. The findings revealed that all four strategies significantly enhanced voters' awareness, with public service announcements and stakeholder collaboration exerting the strongest effects, followed by voter education and social media campaigns. This pattern highlights the pivotal role of both mass media and participatory stakeholder networks in disseminating electoral information and fostering public understanding in the Nigerian context. The study makes a key contribution to the literature by extending participatory communication theory to electoral communication in sub-Saharan Africa. It demonstrates how a blend of top-down and dialogic communication mechanisms (through public announcements, collaborative stakeholder initiatives, and interactive platforms) can shape voter awareness. In doing so, the research provides empirical evidence that reinforces global findings while underscoring context-specific dynamics that influence electoral communication strategies in Nigeria. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are presented for possible implementation:

1. Political stakeholders in Nigeria such as INEC should intensify the scope and reach of voter education programmes by utilizing outlets such as information guides, public awareness rallies, political seminars and candidate forums to enlighten the electorate on key aspects of the electoral process to facilitate and encourage voters' participation. Intensifying voter education through these diverse channels contributes to a more informed electorate, and this heightened awareness not only facilitates smoother electoral processes but also encourages greater voter participation.

2. Due to its extensive reach and flexibility, social media should be prioritized as a political public relations tool to educate voters about the electoral process through effective practices such as political content creation, online community organizing, influencer engagement and interactive webinars. The widespread use of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allows for extensive reach, enabling political entities to connect with a diverse audience across various demographics and geographic locations.
3. The importance of collaborative campaigns cannot be overemphasized, which is why government agencies like INEC should harness connections with cultural/religious groups, community leaders, the media and business industry to propagate valuable information to enlighten voters about the electoral process. By leveraging connections with these stakeholder groups, INEC can tap into existing networks that have a wide reach within their members. This is because these groups often hold influence over their members and can effectively disseminate information about the importance of participating in the electoral process, the significance of informed voting, and the procedural aspects of elections.
4. Political stakeholders like INEC should adopt multifaceted channels such as radio, television, outdoor media and online platforms to communicate public service announcements to educate voters on key aspects of the electoral process. These widely accessible platforms have extensive reach, ensuring that important public service announcements from political stakeholders reach a diverse audience. By broadcasting information about the electoral process, voters can be informed about registration procedures, voting rights, and the significance of their participation.

Contribution to knowledge

In the course of this study, new evidence has emerged through empirical test of hypotheses, revealing that public relations can be an effective marketing communication strategy for improving voters' awareness of the electoral process in Nigeria. Evidence from Cross River State, emerging from this study, suggests that PR tools such as voter education programme, social media campaign, stakeholder collaboration and public service announcement can play a crucial role in enlightening and educating Nigerian voters to be more knowledgeable about the electoral system. Another key contribution to knowledge in this research is that in the relationship between PR and voters' awareness of the electoral system, two variables stand out as the most effective in enhancing voters' awareness. These variables in order of relative influence include public service announcement and stakeholder collaboration. As such, an effective political public relation strategy needs to integrate these variables to play an impactful role in enhancing voters' awareness of the electoral process in Nigeria.

Study limitations

This study is not without limitations. First, its geographic focus on Cross River State limits the generalisability of findings to other regions with different political dynamics and media landscapes. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences; longitudinal studies could better capture changes in awareness over time. Third, the use of self-reported questionnaire data introduces the possibility of response bias, as participants may overstate their awareness levels. Future studies should consider mixed methods, including qualitative interviews or media content analysis, to deepen theoretical insights and triangulate findings.

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