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Influence of Channels Television's Voter Education Messages on the Awareness and Participation of South East Residents during 2023 General Election in Nigeria

James Chidiebere Nwodo¹

¹Doctoral Student, Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Abstract

The study investigated the influence of Channels Television's voter education messages on the awareness and participation of South-East residents during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The survey research method was used to carry out the study. The 25268417 residents of South-East Nigeria were used as the population of the study from where a sample size of 384 was drawn using the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator. The multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the local government areas, communities and individuals who participated in the study. Both the questionnaire and interview guide were used for data collection. After the data collection and cleaning, the generated quantitative data were collated, presented and analysed using tables and simple percentages while the generated qualitative data were transcribed and presented using the explanation building technique. Simple percentages were used to answer the research questions. Based on the outcomes of the analysis of data, the study found that Channels Television's voter education messages significantly raised the awareness of voter registration centres among majority of the respondents for the 2023 general elections; the voter education messages by Channels Television could not significantly help majority of respondents to identify their polling units during the 2023 general elections; Channels Television messages adequately raised majority of the respondents' awareness on the political parties and candidates that contested for various positions in the 2023 general elections; and finally the voter education messages by Channels Television significantly mobilised majority of the respondents to properly cast their ballots during the 2023 general elections. The study consequently recommended among others that in preparing voter education messages for subsequent elections in Nigeria, Channels Television should collaborate with INEC and give adequate attention to the aspect of polling units to facilitate voters' awareness and identification of their polling units

Keywords: Influence, Voter Education, Awareness, Participation.

Introduction

There is increasing global realization that credible elections constitute a major factor in democracy, democratization and good governance. Elections in democracies play the vital role of ensuring representation of popular will and, subsequently, help to secure the legitimacy of the political system. It is worrisome, therefore, that there is at the same time global evidence of political apathy, the lack of psychological involvement in public affairs, emotional detachment from civic obligations, and abstention from political activity. Understandably, therefore, there is ongoing concern to understand the sources and character of political abstention. Voter apathy, a subset of political apathy, has thus emerged as a major problem in mature and emerging democracies, settled and volatile societies, large and thriving economies, as well as small and troubled ones, among youth, women and other marginalized groups as much as among mainstream dominant interests (INEC & FES, 2021).

Voter apathy negatively impacts upon the electoral process and its outcome. Any serious effort at electoral reforms to bring about free, fair and credible elections must take into account the challenges of voter apathy. Thus, whenever INEC prepares for elections, it is imperative to study the nature, causes, dimensions and consequences of voter apathy, with a view to being adequately informed in designing future strategies to tackle its challenges in the Nigerian context. In a country trying to deepen democracy after a long history of authoritarian military rule, strategies for mobilising people for popular participation and effective engagement in the electoral process have to be well conceptualised and carefully designed. In doing this, peoples' perceptions and attitudes have to be studied, analysed, understood and taken into consideration (Jega, 2021).

If elections are regarded as the crucial mechanism for sustaining democracy, 'the vote' is certainly a key element of democracy. Citizens' participation in terms of voting during elections is essential to a democracy and voting is viewed as one of the many ways in which citizens participate in democracy. Voter education must be linked to civic education, which inculcates political knowledge and culture, democratic values and participation, promotes tolerance and conflict prevention and links voting to broader democratic issues as well as have a longer term strategy outside of the electoral cycle.

In every election, voter education is fundamental because it helps in raising electoral awareness to ensure that all constituents (men and women alike) understand their rights, their political system, the contests they are being asked to decide, and how and where to vote. For an election to be successful and democratic, the citizens must understand their rights and responsibilities, and must be sufficiently knowledgeable and well informed to cast ballots that are legally valid and to participate meaningfully in all the electoral processes. Raising electoral awareness and participation also entails the propagation of information, materials and programmes intended to inform the public about the particulars and procedures of the voting process for election. It involves providing information on who is eligible to vote; where and how to register; how electors can check the voter lists to ensure they have been duly included; what type of elections are being held; where, when and how to vote; who the candidates are; and how to file complaints. These voter education messages are

communication to the electorate using several communication channels and one of such is the media (Ezechinyere, 2014).

As earlier stated, one of such avenues through which voters' education messages can be communicated to the masses is through the media. In Nigeria, media organizations made efforts to educate the public regarding the 2023 general elections. Among such media organizations was Channels Television. Channels Television embarked on aggressive voter education during the 2023 general elections (Okoli, 2023; Njoku, 2024; Eke 2024). Some of the voter education messages aired periodically by Channels Television included "The Office of the Citizen is the highest office in Nigeria", "Your Vote is your right", "Decide your future", "Register to move Nigeria forward." All these voter education messages by Channels Television were aimed at creating the necessary awareness and mobilizing the public to participate in the 2023 general elections.

Statement of the Problem

Available literature have shown that strategic communication is central to effective delivery of voters' education. Scholars like (Blake, 2020; Cole, 2018) believe that any voters' education aimed at increasing voters' awareness and participation during elections must reasonably increase knowledge, change attitude and enhance easy adaptation of proper voting directives.

In Nigeria, media organizations made efforts to educate the public regarding the 2023 general elections. Among such media organizations was Channels Television. Channels Television embarked on aggressive voter education during the just concluded elections. Some of the voter education messages aired periodically by Channels Television included "The Office of the Citizen is the highest office in Nigeria", "Your Vote is your right", "Decide your future", "Register to move Nigeria forward" (Okoli, 2023; Njoku, 2024; Eke 2024). All these voter education messages by Channels Television were aimed at creating the necessary awareness and mobilizing the public to participate in the 2023 general elections.

In view of the above reality, the extent to which Channels Television Voters' Education Messages influenced the awareness and participation of South-East residents in Nigeria's 2023 general elections is unclear. The extent of influence of such messages on their awareness of voters' registration centres, awareness of the political parties contesting for elections, identification of polling units as well as the participation in casting of ballots are yet to be adequately explored by researchers.

There was need therefore, to empirically ascertain the influence of Channels Television's voter education messages on the participation of South-East residents in Nigeria's 2023 general elections. This was considered a serious gap in knowledge which the outcome of the study filled

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. To what extent did Channels Television's voter education messages influence South-East residents' awareness of the voter registration centres for the 2023 general elections?
2. What is the extent to which Channels Television's voter education messages influenced South-East residents' awareness of the political parties/candidates for the 2023 general elections?
3. To what extent did Channels Television's voter education messages influence South-East residents' identification of their polling units during 2023 general elections?
4. What is the extent of influence of Channels Television's voter education messages on South-East residents' participation in casting of ballots during the 2023 general elections?

Literature Review

The Media, Voter Education and Citizens' Awareness and Participation in Elections

One of the fundamental aims of democratic elections all over the world is to provide electorates with a legitimate opportunity to exercise their political rights and vote for the political parties and candidates of their choice, supporting their social and economic policies, and future priorities and programs. A meaningful exercising of the above choice, it would seem, requires, among other things, 1) a free and fair media that can report on the politics of the day in an unprejudiced manner; 2) an examining of the political agenda and the platforms of different political parties and their candidates; 3) the ability to publish these views via different media formats i.e., online news, newspapers, and television; and 4) an informed citizenry that has respect for facts and is open to human reasoning, logic and rational persuasion (Mill 2002, 43-44).

The media serves an essential role in democracies. It provides information that allows citizens to make informed decisions inside and outside the voting booth. It holds the powerful to account for the integrity, peace and fairness of an election. The media can also contribute to the electoral agenda by requiring politicians to respond to the public, and to focus on subjects of real public interest. Informed citizens, who understand the current complex global political environment, are likely to feel more empowered to exercise their democratic rights and accept outcomes of free and fair elections. This is not likely to be the case when media is thwarted from playing its role (Conference Proceeding of the World Press Freedom Day 2019). The media plays a critical role in the functioning of every democracy and a true democratic election would likely not be possible without the media. A free and fair election is not only about the freedom to vote and the knowledge of how to cast a vote, but also about a participatory process where voters engage in public debate and have adequate information about parties, policies, candidates and the election process itself in order to make informed choices. Therefore, the media acts as a conduit for political knowledge (AFRIC 2018).

As earlier stated, the media are essential to democracy, and a democratic election may be impossible without media. A free and fair election is not only about the freedom to vote and the knowledge of how to cast a vote, but also about a participatory process where voters engage in public debate and have adequate information about parties, policies, candidates and the election process itself in order to make informed choices. Furthermore, media acts as a

crucial watchdog to democratic elections, safeguarding the transparency of the process. Indeed, a democratic election with no media freedom, or stifled media freedom, would be a contradiction in terms of what democracy stands for (ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, 2021).

At least, three principal democratic roles of the media pertain to elections-information, analysis, debate and discussion. By playing the roles of information, analysis and open forum for debate and discussion, the media act as institutional aid and guide to citizens in making electoral choices. If these roles are played well, citizens stand a greater chance of making choices based on knowledge rather blind loyalties. Of critical importance for this role is that media should enjoy editorial and programming independence from vested interests of all types and be professional and ethical (Kupe, 2018).

Review of Related Studies

Agyiri (2012) did a study to assess voter education on electoral processes in New Juaben municipality. The study among other things analyzed voters' perception on effectiveness of voter education and the strategies of promoting voter education. The study was carried out against the background that voter education normally delays and do not achieve it intended purpose. The descriptive research design was used by adopting the quantitative method of data collection and analysis. Data was collected from 370 voters using questionnaire. The communities were divided into 52 clusters and then simple random sampling technique was employed to select five communities out of the 52 clusters in the new Juaben Municipality. Another simple random sampling method was used to select two enumeration areas from two communities. Samples were drawn proportionally from the two enumeration areas to form the sample size for the study. Data collected were presented by means of tables and analyzed using percentages. Findings from the study showed that majority of the voters perceive the voter education programme as fairly effective. Specifically, the media did not provide sufficient information on how to vote, voter registration centres, contestants and political parties that participated in the election (Agyiri, 2012). The implication of the findings of this study is that the media failed to make available to the citizens the needed voter education for effective participation in the election.

A UNDP Report shows that the mass media played a crucial role in Nepal's Election Commission voter education campaign. The campaign was conducted with support of UNDP's Election Support Project for the 2017 local level elections in helping to bring information on the voting process and the importance of taking part in polls directly to people's homes through targeted messages disseminated through radio, TV and social media. One of the respondents in the study asserts thus; "I was not much aware of the voter registration process until an election programme on TV that was talking about voter registration and voter list updates at the local level pushed me to take my family to get registered at the rural municipality office," (Report on UNDP's Election Support Project in Nepal, 2017). The implication of this finding is that voter education messages via the media succeeded in influencing the citizens to participate in the processes of the elections.

Drew and Weaver (2006) did a study entitled "Voter Learning in the 2004 Presidential Election: Did the Media Matter?" The study examined the relationships of exposure and attention to various news media, including the Internet, with information learned about the issue positions of candidates George Bush and John Kerry, interest in the 2004 election campaign, and intention to vote among a random sample of adult residents of Indiana who were interviewed by telephone in October 2004. The results were compared with other previous studies of the 1988, 1992, 1996, and 2000 U.S. presidential elections. In general, it was found that attention to television and the Internet are important predictors, or at least correlates, of voter learning of candidate issue positions and voter interest in the election (Drew and Weaver, 2006). The implication of this finding is that the media constitute potent sources of voter information which can enrich the knowledge of the voters regarding the processes of elections.

In Uganda, voter education programme under the Deepening Democracy component of the Democratic Governance Facility (DGF) was implemented by 14 partners that were contracted by the DGF to conduct Civic/Voter Education in 80 districts since 2011. The partners transitioned from Civic Education in June 2015 until May 2016 to support the 2016 general elections voter education requirements. Consequently, a study was conducted to ascertain the cumulative results of the voter education programme over the one year period. The survey population was 600 inclusive of 10% non-response rate and the actual usable returned survey instruments were 588 representing a response rate of 98%. Reliability was confirmed through use of multiple sources of secondary information that supplemented survey findings. The survey data were compared with DGF baseline findings as well as partner mini-survey reports. The respondents were distributed by age, gender, level of education, rural and urban and the analysis of results tended as much as possible to disaggregate data along these variables (Democratic Governance Facility, 2016). Findings from the study showed that the knowledge among the targeted beneficiaries of the programme significantly increased and influenced their participation in the electoral process.

Godana (2015) investigated the influence of voter education approaches on elections outcome in Isiolo North Constituency, Isiolo County, Kenya. It focused on study objectives which sought to establish whether the voter education content, training of voter education providers, methods used and time in provision of voter education would influence elections outcome. The study adopted descriptive survey design to get information from the respondents. Data collection was made using questionnaires. The sampling procedure adopted in the study was stratified and simple random sampling. The data gathered were analyzed by means of Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) software system and presented using descriptive statistics in form of frequency tables and percentages. Fisher's Exact Test of significant was used to measure statistical dependence between variables for each objective. The study findings revealed among others that voter education content especially from the media had the highest influence on the people with a correlation of 52.5% (Godana, 2015). This implies that voter education messages significantly promoted the people's awareness and participation in the electoral processes such as voting procedure, candidates contesting the in elections, dates for the elections, the political parties, and registration points.

Okon, (2013) did a study entitled “Voter Education by the Nigerian Broadcast Media: A Normative Appraisal of three Radio Stations in Port Harcourt Metropolis. This study aimed at exploring whether Nigerian broadcast media, especially Radio, has played its role in educating the masses on a wide range of issues. The study entails content analysis of cognate programs of three broadcast stations in Port Harcourt from January 2014 to March 2014. As inferred from the findings, the stations did not devote significant portion of their informative and educative programs to democracy education geared towards enlightening the populace on the benefits of active participation in the democratic and electioneering processes as characterized by voter registration, voter mobilization and the exercise of franchise. Findings also show that the content of broadcast stations did not create a platform for discourse analysis as powered by issues driven politics (Okon, 2015). This revelation goes to show that the mass media have not adequately created the needed electoral awareness and participation among the people.

Agu, Okeke, and Idike (2013) did a study entitled Voters Apathy and Revival of Genuine Political Participation in Nigeria. The aim of the study was to ascertain the causes of voter apathy among members of the public. The study analyzed the voters’ registration percentage, and voters’ turnout percentage with focus on elections from 1999-2007. The researchers employed Content analysis of available data on elections. Government officially gazette election results were used to assess voters’ turnout trends at the national and state levels. However, compendium results of the 1999, 2003 and 2007 general elections were used to assess voters’ turnout trends and registered voters at the national and state level. The insight from the secondary sources was complemented with fieldwork. The focus group discussion was carried out to gain more insight into the issue. Chinisinga’s method of grouping was adopted. The fieldwork was carried out with groups of 8 – 10 men, women and youths (boys and girls) in each site separately. The rationale for categorizing the FGD as such was to assess whether there would be differentiated experiences, knowledge and perception among these groups about voting in general and voters’ apathy in particular. The study findings reveal among others that the media’s inability to properly communicate voter education messages led to the high rate of apathy among members of the public (Agu, Okeke and Adike, 2013). This finding again shows that the media have not significantly promoted voter education among the citizens.

After the formation of the Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) programme by the Electoral Commission of India (ECI) to address low level of awareness among voters as well as low voter turnout among youth, women, migrant workers, nomadic tribes, and urban elites through aggressive voter education, the ECI commissioned a Baseline Survey to ascertain the Knowledge, Attitude, Behaviour, Belief and Practices (KABBP) of electors. This study was conducted in states where state assembly elections were held from 2010 to 2013, and where parliamentary elections were held in 2014. The ECI engages the services of independent and competent Institutes/ Agencies to conduct the survey. The survey was divided into three stages: 1) The KABBP or situational analysis, 2) Intervention campaign strategy and material pre-testing, and 3) End line or impact assessment. The results from the baseline and end line studies conducted under the KABBP showed that the Electoral

Commission's SVEEP programme has been worthwhile. This was evidenced in significant change in the attitude of the target population, which has reflected in increased registration and turnout of voters in the state where the study and campaigns have been conducted (Shalangwa, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

The Agenda-Setting Theory and Individual Differences were used to explain this study.

Agenda Setting Theory

The notion of agenda setting by the media can be traced to Walter Lippmann in 1922. He suggested that the media were responsible for the "pictures in our heads". Forty years later, Cohen in 1963, articulated the ideas when he argued that the media may not always be successful in telling people what to think, but that they are usually stunningly successful in telling them what to think about. Lang and Lang reinforced this notion by saying that the mass media force attention to certain issues (Ogbuoshi, 2011; cited in Udeze and Chukwuma, 2013). Agenda setting is a process by which the relative attentions given to items or issues in news coverage influence the rank and order of public awareness of issues and attribution of significance. An extension effect to public policy may occur (McQuail, 2000; cited in Olujimi and Adekunle, 2010).

The Agenda setting theory helps in the understanding of the effects of mass media content on individuals, particularly target audience. This theory also explains the effect of the media on culture and society. It describes the powerful influence which the media can have in determining not only the issues, that members of the society talk about, but also how they talk about them (Udeze and Chukwuma, 2013). According to Gladys and Kurt (1983), cited in Ikenna (2011, p.86) "...the media clearly lack powers to suppress concern. But they can do more than stimulate interest. By directing attention to these concerns they provide, a context that influence how people will talk about these matters... the media more than direct attention to a problem; they influence how people will think about it".

Through agenda setting, the media can influence voters to participate in elections by providing them with relevant information which will help to stimulate public attention to the elections and offer cues to action. The implication is that the media, through agenda setting, can raise the consciousness of people on elections and ultimately influence them to participate in the elections.

Individual Differences Theory

This theory was propounded by Melvin De Fleur in 1970. The theory emerged from expositions and laboratory experiments on behaviourism, classical conditioning, learning differences and attitude formation in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Anaeto, Onabajo, & Osifeso, 2012; and Folarin, 2002). Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso, (2012, p.131) assert that the theory has two major assumptions:

1. Members of the mass media audience are made up of different people (in terms of psychographic characteristics)
2. Members of the mass media audience will react/respond to the same media messages in different ways. This is because of the differences in their psychographic characteristics.

The theory argues that because people vary greatly in their psychological makeup and because they have different perceptions of things, media influence differs from person to person (Baran and Davis, 2012). Citing DeFleur, (1970, p.122), Baran and Davis (2012, p.181) averred that more specifically, media messages contain particular stimulus attributes that have differential interaction with personality characteristics of members of the audience. In line with this study, Channels Television voter education messages may have different effects on the residents based on their psychological dispositions as at when the messages were received. This means that the messages may have significant effect on some people while for others, the effect may be minimal or no effect at all. The implication is that some people may respond in accordance to the messages by participating in the elections while others may react to the messages by abstaining from the elections

Methodology

The study was a cross-sectional survey and as such, the survey research method was used to carry out the study. The 25,268,417 residents of the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria comprised the population of the study from where a sample size of 384 was drawn using the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator. The questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. the multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. Firstly, the five states in the South-East geopolitical zone were put into five clusters (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States). At the second stage, the researcher purposively selected four local government areas in each of the five States. This was based on the high level of media reach including signals from Channels Television. Therefore, in Abia State, Umuahia-North, Umuahia-South, Aba-North, and Aba-South, LGAs were chosen; in Anambra State, Awka-North, Awka-South, Onitsha-North and Onitsha-South LGAs were selected; LGAs that were selected in Ebonyi State are Abakaliki, Afikpo-North, Afikpo-South, and Ebonyi. In Enugu State, Enugu-North, Enugu-South and Enugu-East and Nsukka LGAs were selected; while in Imo State, Owerri-North, Owerri-South, Owerri-Municipal, and Okigwe LGAs were selected for the study. The fourth and fifth stages were where the communities and individuals who participated in the study were selected. The collected data were collated, presented and analysed using tables and simple percentages while percentages were used to answer the research questions.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The data collected were analysed and presented as shown below;

Table 1: Extent of influence of Channels Television's voter education messages on respondents' awareness of the voter registration centres in the 2023 general elections

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High extent	216	58.1	58.1	58.1
	Moderate extent	101	27.2	27.2	85.2
	Low extent	4	1.1	1.1	86.3
	Not sure	51	13.7	13.7	100.0
	Total	372	100.0	100.0	

Data in table 1 above show the extent of influence of Channels Television's voter education messages on respondents' awareness of the voter registration centres for the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The table shows that 216 respondents representing 58.1% were highly influenced, 101 respondents representing 27.2% were moderately influenced, 4 respondents representing 1.1% had low influence while 51 respondents representing 13.7% were not sure of the level of influence.

Table 2: Extent of Channels Television's influence on respondents' awareness of the political parties/candidates in the 2023 general elections

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High extent	204	54.8	54.8	54.8
	Moderate extent	129	34.7	34.7	89.5
	Low extent	31	8.3	8.3	97.8
	Not sure	8	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	372	100.0	100.0	

Data in table 2 above show the extent of influence of Channels Television's voter education messages on respondents' awareness of the political parties / candidates in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The table shows that 204 respondents representing 54.8% were highly influenced, 129 respondents representing 34.7% were moderately influenced, 31 respondents representing 8.3% had low influence while 8 respondents representing 2.2% were not sure of the level of influence.

Table 3: Extent of influence of Channels Television's voter education messages on respondents' identification of their polling units during the 2023 general elections

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High extent	78	21.0	21.0	21.0
	Moderate extent	36	9.7	9.7	30.6
	Low extent	251	67.5	67.5	98.1
	Not sure	7	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	372	100.0	100.0	

Data in table 3 above show the extent of influence of Channels Television's voter education messages on respondents' identification of their polling units during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The table shows that 78 respondents representing 21.0% were highly

influenced, 36 respondents representing 9.7% were moderately influenced, 251 respondents representing 67.5% had low influence while 7 respondents representing 1.9% were not sure of the level of influence.

Table 4: Extent of influence of Channels Television's voter education messages on respondents' casting of ballots during the 2023 general elections

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High extent	283	76.1	76.1	76.1
	Moderate extent	37	9.9	9.9	86.0
	Low extent	14	3.8	3.8	89.8
	Not sure	38	10.2	10.2	100.0
	Total	372	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 above shows the extent of influence of Channels Television's voter education messages on respondents' casting of ballots during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The table shows that 283 respondents representing 76.1% were highly influenced, 37 respondents representing 9.9% were moderately influenced, 14 respondents representing 3.8% had low influence while 38 respondents representing 10.2% were not sure of the level of influence.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study were discussed in line with the data presented and related studies that were reviewed.

Research Question One: To what extent did Channels Television's voter education messages influence South-East residents' awareness of the voter registration centres for the 2023 general elections?

The aim of this research question was to ascertain the extent of influence of Channels' Television's voter education messages on raising the awareness of the residents of South-East Nigeria on the voter registration centres to enable them register for the elections. Data presented in table 1 above were used in addressing this research question. Data presented in table show that that majority of the respondents constituting 216 respondents which represents 58.1% of the total respondents were highly influenced by the messages and were aware of the centres for voter registration. The finding is consistent with the finding of a study by Godana (2015) which revealed among others that voter education content especially from the media had the highest influence on the people including voter registration, with a correlation of 52.5% (Godana, 2015). This goes to reveal the critical role of the media in the success of elections in any society. The public education function of the media demands that the media create and possibly improve public awareness on issues of concern and interest. This contributes to citizens' awareness and possibly involvement in making such exercise successful.

Research Question Two: What is the extent to which Channels Television’s voter education messages influenced South-East residents’ awareness of the political parties/candidates for the 2023 general elections?

This research question was put forward to ascertain the extent of influence of Channels Television’s voter education messages on respondents’ awareness of the political parties and candidates that participated in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. This was fundamental because the media has a responsibility to raise awareness among the electorate on the political parties contesting elections as well as the candidates sponsored to contest for various positions. Based on the data presented in table 2 above, majority of the respondents comprising 204 respondents which represents 54.8% were highly influenced by the television station to become aware of the political parties and the candidates for various positions in the 2023 general elections in the country. This implies that the awareness level of most respondents were significantly raised by the voter education messages from Channels Television. Accordingly, Gyang, (2022) found in a study that the media have consistently promoted the awareness of political parties and the candidates for various elections in Ghana. More so, Farauk, (2024), found that the broadcast media adequately raised the awareness of voters in the last Kenyan presidential election. This goes to show the power of the media in the marketing of political parties, politicians and their political ideas. It is in recognition of this powerfulness of the media that political parties and politicians have continued to maximise the media to promote their political ideology and political agenda for the electorate.

Research Question Three: To what extent did Channels Television’s voter education messages influence South-East residents’ identification of their polling units during 2023 general elections?

This research question was focused on finding out the extent to which Channels Television’s voter education messages facilitated respondents’ identification of their polling units during the 2023 general elections. An answer to this question was necessary because no voter can vote if such voter lacks awareness of the location to cast his/her ballot because polling units are where ballots are casted. To address this research question, data presented in table 3 above were used. The data in the table show the extent of influence of Channels Television’s voter education messages on respondents’ identification of their polling units during the 2023 general elections. Based on the data as presented in the data, it was revealed that the extent to which helped majority of the respondent (251 respondents which represents 67.5%) to the locate their polling units was low. The finding is related to that of Manbash (2021) who found in a study that the media over time have not done significantly well in helping voters to easily find the right places for them to vote in Gambian presidential elections. Similarly, Motis (2023) found that the Liberian media did not adequately communicate voting locations to the voters in the last presidential election which resulted in voter confusion and frustration. This finding implies that the aspect of making voters to easily identify where to vote was not well captured in Channels Television’s voter education messages. This missing or inadequate piece of information is very critical to the success of elections. Where voters cannot locate their polling units, they may not be able to vote which may lead to low voter turnout and ultimate failure of the election.

Research Question Four: What is the extent of influence of Channels Television’s voter education messages on South-East residents’ participation in casting of ballots during the 2023 general elections?

This final research question was put forward to find out the extent of influence of Channels Television’s voter education messages on respondents’ participation in voting during the elections. After all the logistics for the elections are put in place, if the voters are not effectively mobilized to come out and vote, the elections may not be successful. This is why voter mobilization is a critical component of every plan for the conduct of elections. To address this research question, the data presented in table 4 above were used. Data in the table show that Channels Television’s voter education messages significantly mobilized the electorate to vote during the elections. The table shows that 283 respondents representing 76.1% were highly influenced by the messages to go and cast their ballots. The fourth finding is consistent with the find of Jackson (2022) who found in a study that the media has consistently mobilised citizens’ participation in elections in Sierra Leone. This is very important because elections are most likely to fail without effective voter mobilization. And the media is expected to be at the forefront of such engagement because of its roles of informing, educating and mobilizing members of the society to participate in issues of national interest such as the general elections that were conducted in Nigeria in 2023.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the study therefore concludes that the Channels Television’s voter education messages were significantly successful in facilitating the awareness and participation of the residents of South-East Nigeria in the 2023 general elections in the country. As can be seen in the findings of the study, apart from voter identification of polling units, the television station, through its voter education transmissions, adequately promoted the awareness of the voter registrations centres and political parties and candidates who contested for various positions during the elections. The messages also effectively mobilised the electorate to go out and properly cast their ballots during the elections. This shows the critical importance of the media in facilitating positive elections’ outcomes. In a democratic environment such as Nigeria, effective political mobilization by the media is very important. This all important responsibility is what Channels Television fulfilled through its voter education messages in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are put forward in line with the findings of the study;

1. In preparing voter education messages for subsequent elections in Nigeria, Channels Television should give adequate attention to the aspect of polling units. This is also very important because lack of knowledge of where to cast a vote is more than enough to prevent an eligible voter from voting. Channels Television should design clear and well

thought-out messages aimed at helping voters to easily identify their polling units so they can ultimately cast their ballots.

2. Channels Television should collaborate with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to gain access to adequate information so as to bring clarity and facilitate this aspect of voter identification of polling units.
3. Channels Television should continue to sustain and even increase the tempo on voter education and mobilization through the provision of adequate voter education messages during elections in Nigeria. This is based on the fact that their voter education messages do facilitate the awareness and participation of the electorate in elections.

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