

The press and citizenship education: Media reportage of political endorsements and electorate behaviour in Nigeria's 2019 presidential election

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Abstract

Background: Political endorsement remains one of the global strategies that features visibly during electioneering campaigns. Such endorsements are usually communicated to the electorate through the media.

Objective: The aim of this study was to ascertain the impact of media reports on endorsement of political candidates during the 2019 election on voter behaviour.

Methodology: This study adopted a combination of content analysis and correlational survey to examine media reportage of political endorsements and the correlation between exposure to such political endorsements and voting behaviour.

Results: It was found that significant relationship exists between source of political endorsement and prominence the media accord to such endorsements. As predicted, political endorsement from socio-cultural and religious groups significantly correlates voting behaviour but political endorsements from celebrities did not correlate voting behaviour.

Contribution: The study has offered fresh perspectives that could aid future debates on issues related to citizenship education during political seasons.

Conclusion: The study concludes that group identity plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of media endorsement of political candidates.

Key recommendation: Other scholars should pay attention to issues like candidates' perceived credibility, party identification and voter behaviour.

Keywords: campaign, political endorsements, media report, voting behaviour

Introduction

Political endorsement is one of the features that defines politicking in democracies. During electioneering campaigns, groups and individuals endorse political parties and their candidates, the trend is common in both advanced and nascent democracies. For example, during the 2016 United States presidential elections, different groups and individuals endorsed Donald Trump of Republic Party and his main opponents, Hilary Clinton of the Democratic Party. Most of such political endorsements are usually communicated to the general public through the media. This implies that the media serve as the conduit through which political endorsements are communicated to electorate.

Political endorsement can be defined as the approval of the political aspirations of a political party or politician. It is a political recommendation of political parties and politicians. Political endorsement usually comes from popular socio-cultural groups, interest groups, political groups, individuals, celebrities, among others. Boudreau (2016)

corroborates that political endorsements could be from different sources which Chou (2014) classified as either celebrities and non-celebrities.

In representative democracies, the electorate are often the target of political gladiators who adopted different approaches to earn their confidence with a view to gaining more votes. The electorate also realize the power that they command, as such, are often very critical of political parties and politicians during electioneering seasons. In every democracy, electorate are members of social groups. Such groups include religious, ethnic, socio-cultural, race, among others. Typically, people will want to identify with their groups. Elff and Roßteutscher (2016) say that social groups are essential in defining voter behaviour among German voters. In this study, attention was focused how political endorsement by socio-cultural groups influence the behaviour of members of such groups.

Motivation and Objectives

Political endorsements have often characterized electioneering campaigns in Nigeria, just many parts of the world. During the 2019 presidential elections in Nigeria, the same scenario played out. Different groups cutting across cultural, religious and ethnic affiliation endorsed political parties and their candidates. The media Nigeria such as radio, television, newspapers and even social media carried such political endorsements. Whether such endorsements influenced electorate is the motivation of this study. Therefore, the objective of this study was to examine the relationship the sources of political endorsement and the prominence the media give to such endorsements. The study also aimed to examine the relationship between exposure to media reports on political endorsements and voter behaviour. In doing so, the social identify theory was used to determine how voter social identity interfere in how media reports on political endorsement influence their voting behaviour.

Media Reportage of Political Endorsements in Nigeria 2019 Presidential election

During the 2015 general election in Nigeria, the mass media of communication reported political endorsements from different groups and individuals. Political gladiators also looked forward to such endorsements as they offer insights into expected victories at polls. Difference offices range from the presidents, to Senators, House of Representatives, Governors and State Houses of Assembly all received endorsements. Prominent among those endorsement came from socio-cultural and socio-political groups, religious groups and ethnic groups. For example, *The Guardian* newspaper of January 25th, 2019 carried a story with the headline: 'Ohaneze Ndigbo meets, endorses Atiku/Obi Ticket.' In the story, the socio-cultural group also attributed the endorsement of Atiku to the fact that one of their own, Peter Obi, a former Governor of Anambra State from South-East Nigeria was a Vice Presidential candidate. It is important to add here that since the return to democracy in 1999, South-East use has not produced either the President or the Vice. The region has, thus, been clamouring for a chance or in the alternative, restructure Nigeria. It appeared that particular endorsement did not receive the overwhelming of some members of Ohaneze Ndigbo as there were dissenting voices. This was evidenced in the *Sun* newspaper story of January 27th, 2019 captioned: 'Ohanaeze's endorsement of Atiku tears Igbo apart.' The story explains how some Igbo leaders were not happy with the move.

In the North the Arewa Consultative Forum, a northern Nigeria's foremost socio-cultural group, endorsed the re-election bid of president Muhammadu Buhari, saying he deserved a second term because of his economic and infrastructural development of the

nation and the need to consolidate on his achievements (Ibrahim, 2019). Apart from socio-cultural groups, religious bodies were not left out. Prominent religious personality also endorsed candidates of their chosen. Some even prophesized victories for political candidates. For example, on the 11th of October, 2018, an online news channel, Sahara Reporters carried a story with a headline: ‘Top Christian, Islamic Leaders Accompany Atiku to a Meeting with Obasanjo.’ Although the story did not indicate clearly whether the Christian bodies endorsed Atiku, their presence and the manner the media framed it suggested that they were for Atiku Abubakar. *The Daily Trust* of February 14th, 2019 also carried a story entitled: “Christian leaders forum endorses Atiku for 2019 presidential election” where the Christian bodies were reported to have endorsed the presidential candidacy of Atiku Abubakar. Also, the *Daily Post* of 2 December 2018 carried a story with the headline, ‘2019 presidency: Pastor Enenche endorses Buhari.’ In the story, the Pastor and his group described the Buhari administration in superlative and based their decision on the fact that his government has favoured Christians. Traditional rulers also joined in the endorsement. For example, On 30th January, 2019, the *Leadership* newspaper carried a story with the headline: “2019: Traditional rulers endorse Buhari, Umahi.” It should be noted that David Umahi is the current Governor of Ebonyi State on the platform of the People Democratic Party while Buhari is of the All Progressives Congress. However, both the President and the Governor appeared to maintain a close working relationship. Both Buhari and Umahi won their re-election bid. Celebrities were not left out. *ThisDay* newspaper of 9 February, 2019 carried a story with the headline ‘Nollywood Group Endorses Buhari, Sanwo-Olu’ Babajide Sanwo-Olu was the Governorship candidate of the All progressives Congress in Lagos State. He won his election as first term Governor. Other individuals like former president Olusegun Obasanjo endorsed Atiku. Overall, Nigeria’s 2019 presidential election witnessed political endorsements from difference sources like socio-cultural groups, religious groups, individuals and celebrities. Such sources may influence the prominence accorded political endorsement as scholars (e.g. Fahmy, 2005; Gevers, 2018, Gevers, Ukonu & Oyeoku, 2018) have reported that the source of media contents significantly influences media reports. Therefore, the researchers hypothesized:

H1: The source of political endorsement will significantly predict prominence accorded such stories.

Political Endorsement and Voter Behaviour/theoretical framework

Political endorsement has received attention in literature (Henneberg, & Chen, 2007; Jackson, 2007) Chou (2014) divided political endorsement into two broad types. They are celebrity political endorsements (CPE) and non-celebrity political endorsement. Henneberg and Chen (2007) define CPE as the use of celebrities as endorsers for political benefits. On the hand, non-celebrity endorsement describe the use of other platforms like religious groups, socio-cultural groups, or even the media. A good example of the media endorsing political parties and individuals could been in Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election. With those words, the Magazine had endorsed Buhari. Vining and Wilhelm (2011) in a study reported that endorsements by US governors for candidates seeking for state political positions was significantly associated with election outcome.

Over the years, scholars (e.g. Ridout, Fowler, and Branstetter 2012; Sanders & Norris 2015) have attempted to understand why the electorate act the way they do. It appears that researchers who are interested in investigating voter behaviour will always find new

aspects to examine because communication, which plays a critical role in electioneering has continued to change. Political players and researchers alike are often interested in understanding voter behaviour. Understanding voter behaviour could help politicians in their campaigns. Journalists will find information on voter behaviour useful because it will guide them on political reporting. Scholars, especially, will benefit from information on voter behaviour for theory interpretation, testing and postulations. Voter behaviour can be defined as all the actions and inactions that people of voting age take in relation to their political system. Such behaviour could include choice of candidates, candidate endorsements, attending political rallies, among others.

The theory that was utilized to articulate this study was social identity theory. Tajfel suggested the theory in 1978 and it was further developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979. The basic argument of the theory is that individual categorization of themselves plays a role in influencing their thoughts as well as behaviour. Some of the groups to which individuals classify themselves include religion, profession, ethnicity, age, among others (Trepte & Laura, 2017).

Based on the postulations of SIT, and empirical studies on voter classifications, the researchers hypothesized:

H2: Political endorsement from religious groups significantly influenced voting behaviour of voters in Nigeria 2019 presidential election.

H3: Political endorsement from socio-cultural groups significantly influenced voting behaviour of voters in Nigeria 2019 presidential election.

H6: Political endorsement from celebrities significantly influenced voting behaviour of voters in Nigeria 2019 presidential election.

Methodology

Study 1: Content Analysis

The first study was a content analysis. The essence of study one was to ascertain newspaper coverage of political endorsement during Nigeria's 2019 presidential election and the prominence accorded such stories. In doing so, attention was paid to the social group whose endorsement was most reported in the newspapers. Content analysis was used because it is the best approach to assess manifest content of media report. The sample size of this study was made up of four newspapers. They are *The Vanguard*, *The Nation*, *The Guardian* and

Daily Sun newspapers. These newspapers were selected using a systematic sampling technique.

The duration of this study was November 18th 2018 to February 15th 2019. This period was chosen because it marked the time when INEC officially lifted ban on campaigns for the presidential election in Nigeria. The census sampling approach was used to select the newspaper editions. The unit of analysis was the article, which included news, editorials, columns, opinions, and letters. The inter-coder reliability using 10% of the stories yielded 0.77.

Measuring Political endorsements

The researcher used the following measures:

Political Endorsement: A story was regarded as political endorsement if it recommended a presidential candidate for the electorate. That is, if the story presents a candidate as a better option for the presidency.

Socio-cultural political endorsement: This describes political endorsement from socio-cultural groups such as Ohaneze Ndigbo, Arewa Consultative Forum, among others.

Religious political endorsement: This describes political endorsement from religious groups or leaders.

Celebrity political endorsement: This describes political endorsement from celebrities like actors, actresses, musicians, comedians, among others.

Individual political endorsement: This type of political endorsement came from prominent persons like former presidents, top politicians, and professionals.

Prominence to Political endorsement

We also assessed the prominence given to political endorsement in media reports. In doing so, the researchers used story placement as measuring indices. Therefore, the following were used.

Front page: Stories that were placed on the front page.

Back page: Stories on the back page.

Centre Spread: Stories on the centre spread.

Inside page: Stories on the inside page.

Results

A total 93 stories on political endorsement were extracted from the four newspapers within a period of 90 days of the official time allowed for campaigns in Nigeria. The details of the result is presented in table one as shown below:

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Table 1: Newspaper Reportage of political endorsements

			Source of Political endorsement					
			socio-cultural	Religious	Celebrity	Individual	Others	Total
Prominence	Inside page	Count	3	0	1	10	10	24
		% of Total	3.2%	.0%	1.1%	10.8%	10.8%	25.8%
	Centre spread	Count	0	0	8	7	0	15
		% of Total	.0%	.0%	8.6%	7.5%	.0%	16.1%
	Back page	Count	5	14	3	0	0	22
		% of Total	5.4%	15.1%	3.2%	.0%	.0%	23.7%
Front page	Count	32	0	0	0	0	32	
	% of Total	34.4%	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	34.4%	
Total	Count	40	14	12	17	10	93	
	% of Total	43.0%	15.1%	12.9%	18.3%	10.8%	100.0%	

The above showed the result of the relationship between the source of political endorsement and prominence accorded such stories from by the newspapers studied. While political endorsement from socio-cultural group were likely to be placed on the front page, political endorsement from religious groups appeared more on the back page while endorsement from celebrities appeared more on the centre spread and endorsement from individuals appeared more on the inside page. This means that more prominence was given to political endorsements from socio-cultural groups.

Test of Hypothesis for Study 1

In study one, it was hypothesized that source of political endorsement will significantly be associated with prominence accorded such stories. The result of the cross tabulation as presented in table one yielded $X^2 = 158.035$, $p\text{-value} = 0.001$ at 12 df. Therefore, the first hypothesis was accepted the researchers conclude that sources of political endorsement significant correlate with newspaper prominence accorded such stories.

Study 2: Survey

Correlational survey was used in study two. This approach was considered useful because it tries to establish the relationship among variables. Therefore, in this study, the researchers attempted to establish the correlation between political endorsement and voter behaviour.

The study was conducted in Enugu State, Nigeria. The population of study was made up of all the registered eligible voters in Enugu State. The sample size for this study was made of 385 voters. The Australian Calculator as provided by the National Statistical Service (NNS) was used. The confidence level was 95% precision level of 0.05 and estimated variance of 5% was used. We used the purposive sampling technique to selected our sample. This was to ensure that only respondents who are registered voters who also voted during the 2019 presidential election were sampled. We used a self-developed questionnaire as instrument for data collection. The questionnaire sought both demographic and psychographic information. Three experts from the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka validated the instrument, The test retest approach was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. It was trial tested on 20 respondents from Abakiliki, Ebonyi State, which is outside the study. After a period of two weeks, the instrument was again administered to the respondents and the calculation yielded correlation coefficient of 0.88, an indication of high reliability. The correlation analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. All analyses were done with SPSS version 22 and results were presented in tables.

Results for Study 2

A total of 385 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. 353 copies were returned and found useful. The sample was 66% male and 34% female. The mean age of the respondents was 32 (range 18 and 45). The sample was 87% Christians and 13% Muslims. Also, the sample 45% of the sample were first time voters while 55% were experienced voters. Also, 53% of the sample reported that they had decided on who to vote before the official commencement of campaign while 47% reported that they were undecided. All the respondents admitted identifying with socio-cultural and religious groups whose political endorsements were reported to the media.

Table 2: Political endorsement from religious groups voting behaviour

		Correlations					
		Religious PE	Decided voters	First time voters	Undecided voters	Experienced voters	Voting behaviour
Religious PE	Pearson Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N						
Decided voters	Pearson Correlation	-.128					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017					
	N	352					
First time voters	Pearson Correlation	.986**	.126				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.018				
	N	352	352				
Undecided voters	Pearson Correlation	.946**	.121	.959**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.023	.000			
	N	352	352	352			
Experienced voters	Pearson Correlation	.939	.120	.952	.993		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.024	.000	.000		
	N	352	352	352	352		
Voting behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.431**	.132	.442**	.476**	.482	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.013	.000	.000	.000	
	N	352	352	352	352	352	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix above sought to ascertain the association between political endorsement from religious bodies and voting behaviour. The result showed that political endorsement from religious bodies was significantly associated with voting behaviour ($r=.431$). However, endorsement from religious group was not associated with decided and experienced voters. Rather, first time as well as undecided voters were more likely to be influenced by endorsement from religious bodies than their experienced and decided counterparts.

Table 3: Socio-cultural political endorsement and voting Behaviour

		Correlations					
		Decided	First time	undecided	Experienced	Voting behaviour	Socio-cultural
decided	Pearson Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	352					
First time	Pearson Correlation	-.126*					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.018					
	N	352	352				
undecided	Pearson Correlation	.121	.959**				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.023	.000				
	N	352	352	352			
experienced	Pearson Correlation	-.120*	.952**	.993**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024	.000	.000			
	N	352	352	352	352		
Voting behaviour	Pearson Correlation	-.132*	.442**	.476**	.482		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.000	.000	.000		
	N	352	352	352	352	352	
Socio-cultural	Pearson Correlation	.124	.986**	.944**	.937	.453**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.020	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	352	352	352	352	352	352

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation matrix above sought to ascertain the association between political endorsement from socio-cultural bodies and voting behaviour. The result showed that political endorsement from socio-cultural groups was significantly associated with voting behaviour ($r=.453$). However, socio-cultural political endorsement was not associated with decided and experienced voters unlike first time and undecided voters.

Table 4: Celebrity Endorsement and voter Behaviour

		Correlations					
		decided	First time	Undecided	Experienced	Voting behaviour	celebrity
decided	Pearson Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N						
First time	Pearson Correlation	126					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.018					
	N	352					
undecided	Pearson Correlation	.121	.959				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.023	.06				
	N	352	352				
experienced	Pearson Correlation	.120	.952	.993			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.024	.06	.06			
	N	352	352	352			
Voting behaviour	Pearson Correlation	.132	.442	.476	.482		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.06	.06	.06		
	N	352	352	352	352		
Celebrity	Pearson Correlation	.127	.993	.952	.946	.437	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	.06	.06	.06	.06	
	N	352	352	352	352	352	352

The result from the table above sought to ascertain the relationship between celebrity endorsement and voting behaviour of voters. The result showed that political endorsement of politicians from celebrities did not significantly correlate voting behaviour. This was also applicable to first time voters, experience voters, decided and undecided voters.

Test of Hypotheses for Survey

A total of three hypothesis with a view to establishing the relationship between political endorsement and voter behaviour during the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. The second hypothesis for the entire study but first for the survey predicted that political endorsement from religious groups significantly influenced voting behaviour of voters in Nigeria 2019 presidential election. The result of table two yielded P-value (<0.05), hence the hypothesis was accepted and the researcher concluded that political endorsement from religious group significantly influenced voting behaviour during the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. The second hypothesis for the survey predicted that political endorsement from socio-cultural groups significantly influenced voting behaviour of voters in Nigeria’s 2019 presidential election. The result supported the assumption as the p-value was (<.05). Therefore, the researchers concluded that political endorsement from socio-cultural group significantly correlated voting behaviour. The third hypothesis predicted that political endorsement from celebrities significantly influenced voting behaviour of voters in Nigeria’s 2019 presidential election. That assumption was not supported (p>.05).

Discussion of Findings: Studies 1 & 2 Combined

This study examined media reportage of political endorsement and whether such endorsements correlate voting behaviour. Nigeria's 2019 presidential election was used as a test case. Two separate studies were conducted to achieve the study objectives. The first study involved a content analysis of four national newspapers- *The Guardian, Daily Sun, Vanguard and Nation*- for a period of official campaigns for the presidential election. In the first study, it was hypothesized that source of political endorsement will significantly correlate newspaper prominence to such stories. The result of the Chi-Square test of independence supported that assumption ($p < 0.05$). The result was consistent with previous studies (e.g. Fahmy, 2005; Gevers, 2018; Gevers, Ukou & Oyeoku, 2018) that have reported significant relationship between source of stories and media report. In particular, Gevers while noting the power of the source in media framing argues that the source is the frame because the source determines how stories are framed. In the current study, we have shown that the source also determined the prominence that newspapers give to stories. The dominant sources of political endorsement found were socio-cultural group, religious group, celebrities and individuals. Overall, there were more political endorsement from socio-cultural groups followed by religion celebrities and individuals in that order. The result of the survey tested three hypotheses with a view to establishing the relationship between exposure to political endorsement as reported from the media and voting behaviour. The result revealed that significant correlation exists between socio-cultural political endorsement and voting behaviour. Also, a significant correlation was found between political endorsement from religious bodies and voting behaviour. This relationship was moderated by voting decision and experience with voting. For example, undecided voters were more likely to be influenced by political endorsement from socio-cultural and religious bodies than their decided counterparts. Also, first time voters were more likely to be influenced by political endorsement from socio-cultural and religious bodies than their experienced counterparts. There was no significant association between political endorsement from celebrities and voting behaviour. This was same for both decided and undecided voters as well as experienced and first time voters. The result of this study was consistent with that of Vining and Wilhelm (2011), who reported that political endorsement significantly correlate voting behaviour.

The result of this study showed strong support for social identity theory. This is because, it was found that voters who identify with their socio-cultural and religious groups are likely to accept the political endorsements from such groups. This is evidence in the fact that the voters rated socio group higher than endorsement from celebrities. The result of the study confirms the seventh principle of the theory which is regarded as a major part of SIT's theoretical groundwork. It is dedicated to the consequences of this process, that is how individual mobility, social creativity, social competition, and stereotyping are affected.

Conclusion/Recommendations

Based on the result of this study, the researchers conclude that sources of political endorsement significantly correlate media prominence to such political endorsement. The researchers also conclude that newspapers report political endorsement from socio-cultural group than any other source of endorsement. It is also the conclusion of the researchers that political endorsements from socio-cultural and religious groups play a critical role in influencing the voting behaviour of voters. The researchers conclude that such association is

moderated by voter decision and experience with voting. The result has three broad contributions. First, the study has shown that source of political endorsement could influence media prominence to such endorsement. This aspect has rarely been explored by previous researchers. Second, the result has implications on political communication, especially where the objective is to influence the voting behaviour of the electorate. Finally, the result has offered fresh perspective to the social identity theory by revealing how individual identification with group could influence their acceptance of the groups' political endorsement. Further studies are recommended to cover more areas in Nigeria for better understanding. Also, other researchers are also recommended to ascertain if there is an association between the media used and acceptance of political endorsements by the electorate. Finally, it is recommended that other scholars should pay attention issues like candidates perceived credibility, party identification and voter behaviour.

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