

ROLE OF VOTER EDUCATION IN CURBING ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN THE 2019 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

Silk Ugwu Ogbu (Ph.D.)

Pan Atlantic University, Km 52 Lekki Epe Expressway, Ibeju-Lekki, Lagos – Nigeria.

Email: sogbu@pau.edu.ng

ABSTRACT: *In recent years, every election season in Nigeria has been marred by a gory cycle of electoral violence that claim many innocent lives. The broad objective of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the mass media, social media, and word-of-mouth communication as voter education tools for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State of Nigeria. The study was conducted by using an opinion survey, and questionnaires distributed through physical and online methods were the major instruments for data collection. The respondents were made up of electorates drawn from the 23 local government areas of Enugu State, Nigeria. Results from the study indicate that the social media and mass media communication tools employed in voter education campaigns against electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were not significantly effective, while the word-of-mouth communication approaches employed were effective. The ineffectiveness of the social media and mass media as communication channels for voter education aimed at curbing electoral violence in the State was traced to the disconnect between the messenger (Nigerian politicians) and their messages. The lack of trust among electorates for the political actors affected their acceptance of the messages on electoral violence from those channels because they were perceived as using them for mere publicity purposes and also doing things different from what they were preaching. Based on this outcome it was recommended among other things that a proactive nationwide voter education campaign should be initiated through social media, the mass media, and word-of-mouth communication to enlighten the Nigerian populace on the dangers of electoral violence before every election season in the country.*

KEYWORDS: election, voter education, electoral violence, mass media, social media, word-of-mouth communication.

INTRODUCTION

Newspaper reports had it that many states, including the Enugu State of Nigeria, were not spared of electoral violence in the 2019 general elections. For instance, on March 9, an election observer was killed in Enugu during the governorship poll. A graphic video by Premium Times newspaper shows a man on the ground in the pool of his blood, as a man who appeared to be a relative wept over the unresponsive body (Okakwu, 2019). Hence, the calls for more voter education against violence by concerned citizens and international observers. According to the United Nations (2018), voter and civic education are even more critical in post-conflict countries, where political situations may be volatile and also at places where elections have been manifesting unprecedented levels of violence.

Eldridge, Mimmi, Nyström & Utas (2012), assert that electoral violence is a coercive and deliberate strategy used by some political actors to advance their interests or achieve specific political goals concerning an electoral contest. It may take place in all parts of the electoral cycle: in the run-up to elections, on the day of elections, and in the immediate post-election period. Election-related violence is not limited to physical violence but includes other coercive means, such as the threat of violence, intimidation, and harassment. Atuobi (2011) opines that electoral violence or election-related violence is understood as violent action against people, property, or the electoral process, intended to influence the electoral process before, during, or after elections. The costs associated with electoral violence are high. Even in situations in which the human death toll remains low, electoral violence may have a critical impact on the electoral process, the outcome of the elections, and their perceived legitimacy. In the long run, it may harm the prospects for democratic consolidation and perceptions of democracy among the population in a political system. Electoral violence may also create a humanitarian crisis and halt or reverse socio-economic development programs. In extreme situations, it may increase the risk of armed conflict or civil war. Electoral violence can also go beyond the societies where it occurs and affect neighboring states by displacing large border populations, introducing a humanitarian crisis, and increasing the circulation of arms as well as armed violence, which may contribute to instability in already volatile regions (Eldridge et. al., 2012). Above all, electoral violence inflicts unquantifiable damages to a nation's international image. The international community view such countries and their people as uncivilized, unruly, unorganized, and people who have no respect for human life (ERN, 2007; CDD, 2007).

Bekoe (2011), reports that in the 2011 general election in Nigeria, post-election violence claimed 800 lives over three days in northern Nigeria and displaced 65,000 people, making the elections the most violent in Nigeria's history. The violence was triggered by a belief that challenger Muhammadu Buhari, a northerner, should have won the presidential election. Muslims burned churches and attacked Christians and southerners in their homes, businesses, schools, and on the streets. Christians retaliated. According to Maku (2013), Nigerian politicians adjudge elections as good only if they win, but any election they lose is bad no matter how free and fair.

Gidado (2008) notes that pre, during and post-election violence and election rigging are major problems in all Nigerian elections. Likewise, Bibby (2004) points out that at the victims of electoral violence and rigging in Nigeria are youths, misguided by the political elites. Bala (2009) also observes that all these have contributed to the lack of confidence in Nigeria democracy, electoral system, process, and results. Thus, the need for voter and civic education before any election season in the country cannot be over-emphasized.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigeria Election Violence Report revealed that 18 persons were killed in the South-East during the 2019 general elections. The Report said that 530 persons also suffered varying degrees of injury during the elections. The report which was presented by one of the non-governmental organizations that monitored the election, Women's Aid Collative, in partnership with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), gave the breakdown of the figures as follows: one person was killed in Enugu State; six killed in Imo State; two killed in Anambra State

while nine persons were killed in Ebonyi State (Ogbonna, 2019). In the same vein, elections in all the 36 States of the Federation witnessed violence, killings, and destruction of property.

Ochie (2019), also reports that 18 cases of violence were recorded in Enugu State, while 32 of such cases were recorded in Abia State, 84 cases of violence were recorded in Imo State, out of which six people were killed while 306 people were injured. Anambra State, recorded 27 cases of violence, out of which two people were killed and 18 people injured. On the other side, Ebonyi State recorded 124 cases of violence, out of which nine people died and 91 people were injured. Also witnessed was a large scale of vote-buying and voter-intimidation by political thugs, while eight vehicles were destroyed, 10 houses burnt and 15 motorcycles destroyed during the violence (Ochie, 2019).

In some instances, the police and members of other security agencies who should prevent violence and electoral frauds were alleged to be aiding such anti-democratic acts in favor of the ruling parties. For instance, Ajaero (2007) reported that instead of providing security, the police were often deliberately used to scuttle the electoral process. There are several cases where they looked the other way while under-age voting, stuffing of ballot boxes, and false thumb-printing occurred. All these anti-democratic acts, unarguably, call for serious voter education to remedy the situation, through the right media tools. In that regard, the extent to which media tools were employed to educate voters in Enugu State on curbing electoral violence forms the major thrust of this study.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to evaluate the extent of effectiveness of the media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study include:

- i. To ascertain the effect of social media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria.
- ii. To determine the effect of mass media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria.
- iii. To examine the potency of word-of-mouth communication tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

To find answers to the issues raised for determination in the study, the following null hypotheses were tested:

- i. Social media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were not significantly effective.
- ii. Mass media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were not significantly effective.
- iii. The word-of-mouth communication tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were not significantly potent.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The major concern of this study hinges on the cultural, structural, and religious undercurrents of electoral violence. According to Atuobi (2012), a cultural perspective presupposes the existence of a political culture that generally predisposes actors to engage in violence and intimidation during political contests as has been the case in Nigeria since the country's independence. The structural explanation suggests that society and politics are organized in a manner that generates conflict (Friedrich & CRC, 2001). Both perspectives are usually reinforced by ethnic rivalries and mobilization in politics in most African countries that have witnessed the persistence of violence during elections (Atuobi, 2012).

Structurally, electoral violence accrues from poor election organization and management problems, weakness in the electoral system, and the lack of independence and capacity of election management bodies to deliver on their constitutional mandate. The proponents of this school of thought believe that for an election management body to manage free and fair elections, it must be truly independent and free from the influence of the ruling party or opposition parties in line with the constitutional provisions. But this is not always the case in most African countries, hence, the rampant incidence of pre and post-election violence. The capacity of the election management body to manage transparent, free and fair elections can be measured by its ability to perform functions such as voter registration, training polling assistants, voter education, managing logistics on election day, vote tallying, announcing results and settling electoral disputes, without constraints (Atuobi, 2012).

On the other hand, religion-inspired electoral violence occurs when religious sentiments, religious cleavages, and religious sympathies are the major reasons for pre-and-post-electoral violence, as was the case in Nigeria's general election of 2011 and even previous elections. Politicians here hide under a religious cover to drum support and to mobilize restive crowds against their opponents who are usually of another religious persuasion. The politicians neglect the fact that their electoral fortunes depend on how well they can brand, rebrand, and market themselves. This is because perceptions and receptions of political candidates amongst voters are closely tied to their political brand image (Jain, Pich, Ganesh & Armannsdottir, 2017; Varsha, Chawla, Ganesh & Pich, 2018). These theoretical postulations of the causes of electoral violence combined have been playing themselves out in Nigerian elections since independence in measured degrees from one election to another.

Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Since the country's independence, Nigeria's general elections had been marred by violence. In the first republic, it was widespread post-election violence triggered by allegations of election rigging, especially in the western part of the country. The people of the region saw Chief Obafemi Awolowo the leader of the Action Group as their political messiah, but Chief Samuel Akintola's party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) won in a controversial election, thus triggering a massive violent protest (Nwokeke and Jawan, 2011). The widespread violence that followed in many parts of the region and across the country resulted in a military takeover of

government on January 15, 1966 (Momoh, 2005). In the present dispensations of civilian rule, violence still characterizes every general election in the country, threatening its fragile democracy and dampening its international image. For instance, according to Human Rights Watch (2004), in the 2003 general elections, the pre-election period saw more than 200 people killed in election-related clashes all over the federation and by the time election ended, the body count has surpassed 300.

Before the 2007 general elections, the country was over-heated over feuds between the President, Olusegun Obasanjo, and his Vice, Atiku Abubakar. There were also agitations from northern politicians that power must return to their region. To worsen the situation, President Obasanjo's alleged moves to manipulate the legislatures for a constitutional amendment that would allow him a third term in office led to increased tension in the polity (Nwokeke and Jawan, 2011). The country was politically over-heated, volatile, and fragile. Obasanjo warned all who cared to listen that the forthcoming election was going to be a-do-or-die-affair (Awowole-Browne, 2007). The post-election period witnessed the killing of political opponents including PDP chieftains who expressed a contrary opinion to the powers above. Finally, the post-election crisis saw the death of over 300 Nigerians (Bekoe, 2011). Likewise, despite a largely acclaimed free and fair election in 2011, 800 people were killed in three days and 65,000 people were displaced (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Muslims burnt churches and attacked Christians and southerners in their homes, businesses, schools, and on the streets. For the first time in the history of the country's elections, seven bomb blasts occurred in several parts of the country, as follows: April 8, 2010, at the INEC offices in Suleija, Niger; May 9, 2010, at the Shadawanka barracks in Bauchi state; October 1, 2010, in Abuja at the independence day celebration; two blasts in December 29, 2010 at the rally of Beimo Rufus-Spiff, a candidate for the governorship of Bauchi State; two blasts on December 31, 2010, in Abuja (Bekoe, 2011). There were other ominous signs of potential violence: Buhari's warning of an "Egypt-style" revolt if the elections were not free and fair; Buhari's admonition that his supporters should defend their votes; And his declaration that going to court to contest the elections would be a waste of his time provided his supporters with the unspoken instruction to take their protests to the streets (Bekoe, 2011). Hence, violence started soon after INEC declared Jonathan the winner, and this resulted in the death of over 800 innocent souls in the country (Human Rights Watch, 2011). According to Atuobi, (2012: 13), the nature or manifestations of electoral violence in Nigeria violence include:

- murder/killings;
- looting, destruction, and damage of property;
- assault and death threats;
- bombings;
- forceful dispersion of political rallies;
- fighting among political parties;
- violent street protests and hooliganism;
- arbitrary detentions and arrests without warrant;
- abduction;
- economic repression or sabotage; and

- intimidating voters and attempting to prevent them from voting.

Religion and Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Apart from in the 1st Republic where electoral violence in Nigeria was largely due to allegations of election rigging, other wide-scale electoral violence in the country wore the garb of religious differences. This is usually along the lines of the two dominant religions in the country – Islam, and Christianity. This Muslim - Christian altercations are bifurcated sometimes along the country's ethnic, regional, and tribal lines, with long standing expectation of sharing power. For instance, many believe that the unprecedented 2011 electoral violence and the post-election crisis arose because President Jonathan is a Christian and southerner, and people in the North felt strongly that he should have conceded the presidential bid to a northerner and Muslim in honor of an unwritten rotation of power between the north and south (Bekoe, 2011; Onwudiwe and Berwind-Dart, 2010). President Olusegun Obasanjo, a southerner, and Christian had been replaced by Umaru Yar'Adua, a northerner, and Muslim. Yar'Adua's untimely death in 2010, midway through his term, catapulted the then Vice President Jonathan to the presidency. The proponents of the power rotation argued that Jonathan should not have contested the presidency because the north had not finished its turn (Aljazeera.com, 2013). Thus, it does not matter to many the political pedigree or qualification of a candidate and his ability to deliver services to the people, as long he belongs to their religious group. To the proponents of this mind-set, political contests and power-sharing arrangements in the country must be constructed along the lines of the two dominant religions.

Voter and Civic Education

Polyas (2017), says that voter education means providing citizens of a democratic state with basic information about participating in elections. Voter education is often provided by the state institutions charged with public enlightenment and national orientation matters. United Nations (2018) points out that voter education 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. The goal of voter education is to adequately create awareness and make information available and accessible to all citizens and participants in the democratic process. Every good voter education campaign must seek to achieve universal coverage of the electorates, by reaching out to disadvantaged groups as well as mainstream voters. It must also try to accommodate differences in illiteracy rates, differences in languages, religion, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds in a country, even if there is only one official language, like English in Nigeria. Minority groups, internally displaced persons and other marginalized segments of society should be specially accommodated. Voters must be taught how to register and cast their ballots. Voter education should also include mass mobilization of the people for full participation in the whole electoral process especially encouraging them to vote and to shun violence (United Nations, 2018).

A good voter education initiative should also specifically encourage the weak and vulnerable in society such as women to participate in the electoral process. It should make it clear that suffrage is universal and should help create a culture in which women and other minority groups are

encouraged to participate and are welcomed into the electoral process. For example, it should highlight the fact that women have equal rights like men to vote and be voted for.

On the other hand, IFES (2018), reports that civic education deals with broader concepts underpinning a democratic society such as the respective roles and responsibilities of citizens, government, the electoral body, and democratic institutions. It is a process aimed at conveying knowledge of a country's political system and context, encompassing information on the system of government; the nature and powers of the offices to be filled in an election; the principal economic, social and political issues facing the nation; the value of democracy; the equal rights of women and men; and the importance of peace and national reconciliation. In every election, voter and civic education are necessary 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, voters 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 the voting process. Voter and civic education are even more critical in post-conflict countries, where political situations may be volatile and where elections may have an unprecedented impact on the countries' future (United Nations, 2018).

Voter education is most effective when linked with a program of civic education that puts the election into context for voters and provides an explanation of the election's purpose, issues, and their significance. Ideally, civic education will be built into a country's educational system so that when children reach voting age, they will already understand the basics of the national and local political and electoral systems. However, since this is not always the case, and since these systems may change over time, it is vital to have a continuing program of civic education linked to electoral processes (ACE Project, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

A survey design was used in the study. The primary data were gathered through hard copies and electronic questionnaires (E-questionnaire) via the Internet from the respondents in different parts of Enugu State, Nigeria. The population of the study was estimated at 360,000. The sample size of 399 was determined through the Taro Yamane formula. The data are hereby presented in Likert's 5-points scale and analyzed with the measure of central tendencies (Mean).

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data generated from the fieldwork indicate that 60.90% of the respondents were male, while 39.10% are female; 20.80% are in the age range of 25 to 35 years, 32.83% in the age range of 36 to 45 years; 27.82% in the age bracket of 46 to 55 years, while 18.55% are 56 years or above. Also, 23.31% of the respondents are active politicians, 61.85% are mere electorates, 10.84% are made up of the ad-hoc and permanent staff of the nation's electoral body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), while the remaining 4.0% are local and international election observers and foreign journalists.

Table 1: Respondents' views on whether social media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were effective

Options	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	43	10.78%
Agree	31	7.77%
Undecided	29	7.27%
Disagree	179	44.86%
Strongly Disagree	117	29.32%
Total	399	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019.

Data on Table 1 show that 10.78% of the respondents strongly agreed that the social media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were effective; 7.77% equally agreed with that; 7.27% were undecided; 44.86% disagreed, while the remaining 29.32% strongly disagreed with this viewpoint.

Table 2: Respondents' views on whether the mass media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were effective.

Options	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	64	16.04%
Agree	67	16.79%
Undecided	21	5.26%
Disagree	136	34.08%
Strongly Disagree	111	27.82%
Total	399	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019.

Data displayed on Table 2 reflect that 16.04% of the respondents strongly agreed that the mass media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were effective; 16.79% equally agreed with that; 5.26% were undecided; 34.08% disagreed, while 27.82% strongly disagreed with this viewpoint.

Table 3: Respondents' views on whether word-of-mouth communication tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were significantly potent.

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	134	33.58%
Agree	146	36.59%
Undecided	29	7.27%
Disagree	49	12.28%
Strongly Disagree	41	10.28%
Total	399	100%

Source: Field survey, 2019.

Data on Table 3 show that 33.58% of the respondents strongly agreed that the word-of-mouth communication tools employed in voter educations for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were significantly potent; 36.59% equally agreed with that; 7.27% were undecided; 12.28% disagreed, while 10.28% strongly disagreed with the viewpoint.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1:

H₀₁: Social media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were not significantly effective.

H₁₁: Social media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were significantly effective.

Test Statistics = Measure of Central Tendency (Mean)

Decision Rule:

If Mean < 2.5, the Respondents Disagree.

If Mean < 3.5, > 2.5, the Respondents are Undecided.

If Mean ≥ 3.5, the Respondents Agree.

Table 4: Test of social media effectiveness as voter education's tool for curbing electoral violence in Enugu State, Nigeria

S/N	Questions	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	social media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were effective	43 (215)	31 (124)	29 (87)	179 (358)	117 (117)	2.26	Disagree
	Result						2.26	Disagree

Result Interpretation: Hypothesis one is tested with data from Table 1. The result was a Mean score of 2.26 < 3.50, hence, showing the respondents disagreed with the view that social media tools employed in voter educations for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were effective. This result, however, indicates acceptance of the null hypothesis which states that: "Social media tools employed in voter educations for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were not significantly effective."

Hypothesis 2:

H₀₂: Mass media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were not significantly effective.

H_{i2}: Mass media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were significantly effective.

Test Statistics = Measure of Central Tendency (Mean)

Decision Rule:

If Mean < 2.5, the Respondents Disagree.

If Mean < 3.5, > 2.5, the Respondents are Undecided.

If Mean ≥ 3.5, the Respondents Agree.

Table 5: Test of social media effectiveness as voter education's tool for curbing electoral violence in Enugu State, Nigeria

S/N	Questions	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	Mass media tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State were effective	64 (320)	67 (256)	21 (63)	136 (252)	111 (111)	2.51	Undecided
	Result						2.51	Undecided

Result Interpretation: Hypothesis 2 is tested with data from Table 2. The result obtained was a Mean score of 2.51 which is less than 3.50 ($2.51 < 3.50$), hence, showing the respondents are not certain on whether mass media tools employed in voter educations for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were effective. This indeterminate result indicates acceptance of the null hypothesis which states that: "Mass media tools employed in voter educations for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were not significantly effective."

Hypothesis 3:

H₀₃: The word-of-mouth communication tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were not significantly potent.

H_{i3}: The word-of-mouth communication tools employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were significantly potent.

Test Statistics = Measure of Central Tendency (Mean)

Decision Rule:

If Mean < 2.5, the Respondents Disagree.

If Mean < 3.5, > 2.5, the Respondents are Undecided.

If Mean \geq 3.5, the Respondents Agree.

Table 6: Test of word-of-mouth communication effectiveness as voter education's tool for curbing electoral violence in Enugu State, Nigeria

S/N	Questions	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Decision
1	word-of-mouth communications employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State were effective	134 (670)	146 (584)	29 (87)	49 (98)	41 (41)	3.71	Agreed
	Result						3.71	Agreed

Result Interpretation: Hypothesis 3 on the potency of word-of-mouth communication as a voter education tool for curbing electoral violence in Enugu state, Nigeria was tested with data from Table 3. The result obtained was a Mean score of 3.71 which is greater than 3.50 ($3.71 \geq 3.50$), hence, showing the respondents agreed that word-of-mouth communications employed in voter educations for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were potent. This result indicates the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis.

Summary of Results and their Implications

The implication of the Hypothesis 1 test result points to the perception that social media have become notable tools for inciting electoral violence in Nigeria, hence, it is very essential for voter education and for curbing electoral violence in the country to focus more on the platform. This is because it is the youths, mainly, that are used to foment trouble or violence, and social media is very popular amongst the Nigerian youth population. This result agrees with the uses and gratifications theory developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1974, which states that media consumers actively seek out specific media and content to achieve certain results or gratifications that satisfy their personal needs (Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso: 2008; Folarin, 2002). According to Nayyar (2007), media choice and gratifications depend on the audience, who use the media to satisfy their needs and who view the media based on the value they place on them. This must be why Buhari, Ahmad & Ashara (2014), assert that the new media, and by extension social media are drivers of social change, national development, and organizational development. The result is also buttressed by several previous studies which found that social media has diverse benefits which include building brand reputations, developing useful collaborations and result-

oriented marketing communications' strategies for effective brand management ((Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Ngai et al., 2015; Laroche et al., 2013).

The result also agrees with the findings of McArthur Foundation & PLAC (2012), that to address the flaws that marred previous elections in Nigeria, various organizations, institutions, and individuals set up social media platforms that enabled the citizens to oversee the electoral process and report electoral malpractices to authorities through their mobile phones, computers and other electronic devices. Through social media platforms, an overwhelming number of videos, photos, tweets, and comments were shared, and the widespread use of these real-time media made people much more aware of the electoral processes. However, while social media present various new opportunities for engaging the youth, there was no deliberate or significant effort by political actors to leverage the platform for voter education, especially targeted at curbing electoral violence during the 2019 elections in Enugu State. On the contrary, various youth groups explored the platforms for sending threat messages and mobilizing thugs who perpetrated various acts of violence against supporters of their political opponents.

Notwithstanding the outcome of the test result of Hypothesis 2, the mass media remains a very crucial tool for voter education and for curbing electoral violence in Nigeria. However, this result highlights the fact that you cannot easily separate the message from the messenger. The credibility of the messengers, in this context, the Nigerian leaders and politicians came to the fore during the 2019 general elections in Enugu State. Some were seen preaching peace with their mouth through the mass media while arming and financing youths for electoral violence at the same time. Hence, it was difficult for the electorates to take their media messages seriously. Such ignoble acts only lead to a political brand identity crisis for those political actors (Pich & Dean, 2015) who ought to know that winning the goodwill and support of the electorates comes through astute political marketing initiatives. This is because political marketing and political branding powered through mass media channels have a very vital role to play in modern democratic settings and processes (Ormrod and Henneberg, 2011). The fact that the respondents were undecided about the effectiveness of the mass media in fostering voter education and curbing electoral violence underlines the need to build trust among the electorates through messages that speak directly to the issues of violence and backed up by affirmative action from all the political actors involved in the elections.

The test result of Hypothesis 3, on the other hand, shows that word-of-mouth as tools of communication employed in voter education for curbing electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Enugu State, Nigeria, were potent, which is an indication that people place greater trust on the source than on the content of the messages. This should be an eye-opener for politicians and institutions involved in the design of voter education programs in the sense that both formal and informal communication channels must be optimized if the desire to curb electoral violence in Nigeria is to be achieved.

CONCLUSION

Electoral violence is an evil wind that blows no one any good. It is very disheartening that every election season in Nigeria is characterized by a cycle of electoral violence. The electoral laws on checkmating electoral malpractices, fraud, and violence do not seem to have achieved a noticeable result on this. The political class has not helped matters at all; they are the ones arming and financing the youths who perpetrate various acts of electoral violence in Nigeria. This study has, however, revealed that voter education anchored on social media, mass media and word-of-mouth communication can go a long way in addressing this problem and restoring sanity in the country's electoral culture. Based on the outcome of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

- i. Proactive nationwide voter education campaign should be initiated to enlighten the Nigerian populace on the dangers of electoral violence before every election season in the country.
- ii. Since the majority of Nigerian youths are hooked on social media, relevant social media networks should be employed to assuage them to refrain from electoral violence.
- iii. The mass media which is much more accessible to the Nigerian politicians should be used to convince them to desist from sponsoring electoral violence in the country.
- iv. Word-of-mouth communication should also be used to reach out to parents, town unions, associations, community leaders, students' union's leaders, professional bodies, religious leaders, and many more, to educate their members to shun violence at all cost.
- v. The electoral laws on electoral violence could be strengthened and made stiffer, to serve as a deterrent to all forms of electoral violence covering pre-election, during or post-election periods.

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