

Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis of Audience Perception of the Effects of Public Opinion Polls in Nigeria's Nascent Democracy

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Abstract

This study x-rays the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the effect of public opinion polls in Nigeria's political environment. Using agenda-setting theory, the study made use of triangulation mixed method design. The population of this study was the ensemble of eligible registered voters in the country which was 67 million. Using an error limit of 0.08, the study arrived at a sample size of 156 respondents. Two instruments namely; questionnaire and the interview were utilised in gathering data. Simple percentages and frequency distribution tables were employed in analysing the data. The study found out that public opinion polls can influence the decision of the electorates but such influence is insignificant. It further revealed that opinion polls would have positive effect on the political culture of the country, if properly handled. The study concluded that it is important for media organisations in the country to improve on public opinion polls exercise during elections with the aim of sanitising the political climate of the country. It was recommended that media organisations should not allow themselves to be partisan in their report of public opinion poll results.

Key words: Public opinion polls, Media Campaign and Democracy

Background of Study

Studies over the years have tried to establish that in most cases, public opinion formation in a democratic environment is primarily a function of the media. This function can be exhibited in the agenda setting attribute of the media. McQuail (2010: 523) observed that

in democracies, the media have a complex relationship with sources of power and the political system. On the one hand, they usually find their *raison d'être* in their services to their audiences, to whom they provide information and views according to judgments of interest and needs. In order to perform this service, they need to be independent of the state and of powerful interests. On the other hand, they also provide channels by which the state and powerful interests address the people, as well as perform for the views of political parties and other interest groups. They also promote the circulation of news and opinion within the politically interested public.

Alger (1990: 157) added that "when serious communications about the substance of electoral choice are presented to the public (in an interesting fashion) they respond – and begin to act more like democratic citizenship requires". Significantly, it is important to note that not minding the opinion held by an individual in the course of a political campaign process and the difficulty associated with changing these beliefs, their isolated opinions may not have a firm stand when subjected to public opinion polls.

Scholars have argued that when opinion polls are collected by the media, it constitute another body of information with the credibility of influencing the general perception of the people. McQuail (2010: 515) captured the essence of this argument about public opinion poll when he observed that:

Public opinion does, however, have a certain independence from the individuals contributing to it. This is evident by the fact that individuals have a perception, whether accurate or not, of public opinion as the prevailing view and the view of others. Secondly, 'public opinion' acquires certain independence when it is embodied in media accounts. It becomes an objective 'social fact' that has to be taken account of by political and other actors.

The above assumption is an indication of how powerful public opinion poll can be especially when channelled to a particular result. This boils down to the fact that the people's opinion on political matters and candidates preference can be collected and re-lay to the people so as to help them make informed decisions. Castells (2009: 190-197) opined that in opinion poll, "the political hit men pick up the dirt's in their opponents, these dirt's are then given to pollsters, who through sophisticated polling can determine which pieces of dirt are more damaging in the minds of the voters. The pollsters give their results to the media advertising folks, who put the most damaging two or three negative issues into the tv, radio, and direct-mail pieces that do their best to rip their political opponents into shreds... By the time it's all over, the truth has been exposed – and quite often the opponent has suffered a serious blow to his or her campaign, one from which sometimes they never recover". Though, this represent the use of public opinion poll to achieve negative results, it can still serve tremendous benefit in the political culture of the people.

In the United States of America, public opinion polls are part of the political culture of the people and that is what is obtainable in most developed countries of the world. In US for example, the media (CNN, BBC, FOX TV, and the host of other media) carry and analyse, according to the various states, the public opinion polls of the people as it relates to the performance of candidates, and their total corporate identity. During the 2009 presidential election in the US, public opinion polls had it that Barack Obama would emerge president of the country, and that was exactly how the result turned out to be. In a situation where the outcome of an election is different from the public opinion polls, it would be easy to notice that something went wrong in the process. In the same way, the absence of a well defined public opinion polls might give way for electoral malpractices or racketeering, as nobody knows who is where and who ought to occupy a position at the end of the day. The argument here is that public opinion polls can have some form of effect on the political climate of a country.

Electoral violence, political antagonism or/and apathy, illusions, false expectations and indecisiveness on the part of electorates are some of the things that characterised the Nigerian political environment. In the western world where public opinion polls exist as part of the political culture of the people, some of these anomalies are far from their political system.

This study, therefore, looks at the quantitative and qualitative effect of public opinions polls in Nigeria's political environment, with the aim of examining the issues therein for a better political culture. It will equally examine whether public opinion polls can help bring about credible elections in the country, thereby, preventing the malpractices, violence and litigations noticed during and after elections.

Statement of Problem

Over the years, elections in Nigeria have been bedevilled by series of malpractices, violence and litigations which affects the credibility of elections in the country. Accusations and counter accusations of fraud and electoral malpractices between and among aspirants characterised the entire process. In most cases, international observers go as far as stating out rightly that the elections are marred with irregularities. In some cases, aspirants do have a false impression of their popularity; hence, they presume that they are the people's choice in an election. When the outcome of the elections runs contrary to their opinion of themselves, they not only attribute it to electoral fraud, they go straight to court. This action more often than not, ground political activities within the first few months of political processes after the swearing-in the assumed successful candidates. As these cases linger in courts, supporters of litigants create more tension in the political system. This situation is a serious setback to the political development in the country.

Another issue worthy of note is that most politicians who want to occupy political offices at all cost, resort to the use of thugs and derogatory words/statements to create tensions and mislead the electorates. Thugs are usually used by politicians in rigging elections. This situation creates political apathy on the part of the electorates because they feel their votes do not count. The ultimate consequence of this action is that the entire electoral process is discredited and regarded as a fraud. This is a disturbing situation to the political atmosphere ('polisphere') of Nigeria.

Amidst this present political situation is the ability of the media to monitor the entire political system and engage in public opinion polls on issues relating to the political processes in the country, ranging from candidates reputation, image, ideology, antecedents, preference to the political climate like the use of thugs in election, electoral violence, level of political apathy and improvement in the voting system of the country. The mass media seem not to be doing enough in this area to better the political culture of the country. The problem here is that the Nigerian media environment does not have a well-defined public opinion poll system that can probe into the 'polisphere' of the country with the aim of righting the wrongs therein.

Therefore, the major objective of this study is to examine the quantitative and qualitative effect of public opinion polls on the political environment of the country. Other specific purposes include: to find out whether the Nigerian mass media do engage in public opinion polls during elections: to examine the extent to which the Nigerian mass media engage in public opinion polls during elections: to ascertain the level of influence of public opinion polls on the voting decisions of the electorates: to assess the factors militating against the media in carrying out public opinion polls during the political campaign processes of the country: to determine the effect of public opinion polls on the political climate of the country.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

Do Nigerian mass media engage in public opinion polls during elections? To what extent do the Nigerian mass media engage in public opinion polls during elections? What level of influence has public opinion polls report by the media on the voting decisions of the electorates? What are the factors militating against the media in carrying out public opinion polls during the political campaign processes of the country? What effect has public opinion polls on the political climate of the country?

Literature Review

In a study conducted by Anorue Luke in 2010 titled "Possibilities of Public Opinion Polls in Politics and Mass Media in Nigeria", it was discovered that what exist on political issues and the practices of the mass media in the country is nothing but the smattering of public opinion polls. He concluded that "public opinion is central to the success of politics; especially when the system is people-oriented and that some societies, especially in the developing world, have not accorded public opinion polls a pride of place in their politics (Nigeria is a case in point)" (Anorue, 2010: 44).

Anorue (2010: 35) observed that "any government that wants to succeed by carrying the ruled along in its policies and programmes cannot and should never ignore public opinion and opinion polls. If it does, it does so at its own peril". Supporting these statements, Nnoli (1986: 90) and cited in Anorue (2010: 35) opined that:

If a political system or a political regime is to achieve stability, it needs its structure, beliefs, leaders and policies to be acceptable to the ruled, or at least the most powerful section of the ruled. When the acceptance of any of this structures or objects is lacking, a declining sense of legitimacy creeps in, the regime relies on force, repression is increased and trouble brews; a new regime either comes in or the old one manages to re-establish legitimate rule.

Therefore, a government that wants to remain in power and still have its popularity among the people needs to take public opinion into consideration. Constitutional Right Foundation Election Central (2008) noted that "public opinion now plays an important role in politics. They are used throughout the course of election campaigns by candidates and by media to see which candidates are ahead and who is likely to emerge victorious. The results of these polls, in turn, largely determine where future campaign monies are to be spent and where each candidate's efforts will be concentrated until the close of the campaign."

In the same vein, Foundation for Information (2003:1) noted that “opinion polls have become an essential and vital part of the functioning of democracy around the world. They play more important role in the formation of policies, and provide a reliable measure of the attitudes towards government and other political players, including political parties”.

In a study conducted by Diana Mutz in 1989 titled “The Influence of Perceptions of Media Influence: Third Person Effects and the Public Expression of Opinions”, it was revealed that people believe that the influence of the media is more on other people rather than themselves. “As hypothesized by the third person effect, perceptions of the influence of media reports on others were found to be consistently greater than perceptions of influence on self. Findings were strongly supportive of this component of the 'third person effect' hypothesis. Perceptions of the opinions of others were also explored in relation to respondents' willingness to express their opinions publicly. As suggested by the spiral of silence theory, respondents were found to be more willing to express their opinions publicly when they perceived a trend in support of their viewpoint, or when there was a greater perceived likelihood of achieving success for their issue position. The size of the effect produced from joining these two processes is moderated by the role of issue salience. People perceiving divestment as a highly important issue are more likely to ascribe greater media influence to others than to themselves, but their willingness to express their opinions publicly is least likely to be influenced by perceptions of the climate of opinion (Mutz, 1989: i).

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on the agenda-setting theory. Anyadike (2009: 37) opined that “the basic principle in the agenda-setting theory is the ability of the mass media to restructure the audience thinking and perception of events”.

The implication of the above quotation is that the media through its news selection establish not only issues of public importance, but also determine how much importance to attach to a given issue. This, no doubt, is the role of the media, to bring to the attention of the public issues that are of tremendous importance, thereby eliciting some degree of sympathy or empathy from the masses or appealing to their intellect in order to win favourable advantage in their mind concerning topical issues.

The relevance of this theory to the work under review is that the media can collect an opinion poll of the people and use it to create a particular body of information that will direct the people's thinking towards the need to ensure credible elections in the country. By doing this, a particular agenda can be establish which will direct the actions of the people and make them think alike and act almost in a uniform manner. For instance, a public opinion poll can be collected by the media on the need to have a free and fair election in the country. Since it is an opinion poll result and a programme not sponsored by a partisan entity, the people will trust it the more. This result can then be constantly projected as news/editorial or advertorial on newspapers/magazines and/or programme on radio/TV. Over time, the media would have created an agenda for the people to digest and think in likewise manner. The same approach can be used to gather public opinions on the preferred candidate for a position. When the outcome of public opinion is known, the media can make an agenda for the people, with the primary function of neutralising any possible aggression that opposing parties and their supporters might want to put up before, during and after elections. Both the people and the candidates can know their fate before time thereby helping to prevent the negative situations that arises during the electoral processes.

Methodology

The research design for this study is the triangulation mixed method design. The triangulation mixed method design is a method that allows for the collection of data in both quantitative and qualitative manner. The beauty of this method is that “the researcher gathers both quantitative and qualitative data; compares result from the analysis of both data and make an interpretation as to whether the result from both data support or contradicts each other” (Creswell, 2002: 565).

According to Creswell (2002: 564-565), “the purpose of a triangulation mixed method is to simultaneously collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data and use the result to best understand a research problem. A basic rationale for this design is that one data collection form supplies strength to offset the weaknesses of the other form”.

The population of this study is the ensemble of eligible registered voters in the country. The figure of the eligible registered electorates as provided by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is 67 million (Archibong, 2011: para. 1). The choice of eligible voters as the study population is because they are the ones that can really tell how they are been influenced by public opinion polls and the likely effect of such polls on the political climate of the country.

To determine the sample size of this study, therefore, the Taro Yamani’s formula was used. Yamani (1967: 886) as cited in Eboh (2009: 94) provides a simplified formula for calculating sample sizes. With a confidence level of 95% and a precision of 0.08, the study arrived at a sample size of 156.25 which is approximately 156 persons. This means that a sample size of 156 respondents was used for this study.

Since data analysis is expected to be presented in two phases in a triangulation mixed method which involves the quantitative and qualitative data, two sampling procedures were adopted. In the first sampling procedure the cluster sampling technique was used. In line with this, Nigeria as a country was sub-divided into the six existing geopolitical zones of the country. From each of the political zones, one state each was selected to represent the zones. In all, this gave a total of six states. The choice of these states was as a result of their strategic positions in the zones, their commercial inclinations, media concentration and political dispositions. In these states, the states capitals were purposefully selected because it is the seat of state government, media presence and high political awareness. The instruments were distributed in the local governments of the state capitals. The table below gives a picture of how the sampling was done.

Name of country	Geo-political zones	States in each zones	Selected states	State capitals of selected states	Selected Local government in the selected states
Nigeria	South-East	Enugu, Imo, Abia, Ebony, Anambra	Enugu	Enugu	Enugu-North
	South-South	Edo, Bayelsa, Delta, Cross river, Rivers, Akwa Ibom	Rivers	Port Harcourt	Port Harcourt
	South-West	Ekiti, Osun, Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Lagos	Lagos	Ikeja	Ikeja
	North-East	Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe	Borno	Maiduguri	Maiduguri
	North-West	Sokoto, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Zamfara	Kano	Kano	Kano Municipal
	North-central	Kogi, Benue, Niger, Kwara, Nassarawa, Plateau and FCT	FCT	FCT	Abuja Municipal

Twenty-six copies of the questionnaire were distributed in the local governments from the selected states. In all, 156 copies were distributed.

In the second stage sampling procedure for qualitative analysis, the purposive sampling technique was used. The study made provision for 18 persons that were interviewed in line with the study under investigation. The first 12 persons were gotten by selecting 2 media practitioners (one editor-in-chief and a senior editor in the state television station (NTA)) from the media houses in the states selected. Then 6 chief editors from the radio corporations in the states selected were also interviewed. In all, three persons were interviewed from each of the states selected. This made the total number of people interviewed for this study to be eighteen (18).

This study used two instruments namely; questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire instrument had two sections: the demographic and psychographic sections. The demographic section was used to elicit information about the bio-data of the respondents while the psychographic section focused on the research questions. The questionnaire was drafted in simple sentences consisting of 15 questions. It made use of close and open ended techniques in order to give the respondents enough room to field in responses to the questions. The interview, on the other hand, was framed into a 10 question interview schedule. It comprised of open-ended questions squarely related to the study under investigation. The answers to the interview schedule were coded after qualitative data have been presented. The essence of the coding was to allow for a numerical comparison between the questionnaire and the interview results.

The questionnaire and interview instruments, however, were administered with the help of five trained research assistants. These research assistants are graduate students of the department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. The training process lasted for four days and in each of the days, the research study and how to go about administering the instrument were discussed for two (2) hours. The research assistants were given four weeks to collect and return the filled instrument. As for the respondents, a response window of three weeks was given to them to complete the questionnaire. The validity of the instruments was done using face validity technique. The instruments were given to two communication scholars who are senior lecturers in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

In checking for the reliability of the study instrument, a pre-test was conducted in one local government of the state capitals (Enugu) in Nigeria to ascertain the reliability of the research instrument (Questionnaire). A total of 15 respondents were drawn from the selected local government for this purpose.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data generated were analysed in two phases. The first phase was done quantitatively using simple frequency distribution tables, percentages and numbers to ascertain the effect of public opinion polls on the political environment of the country. The second phase of the analysis was approached qualitatively. By this, data analysis was presented in textual forms separately. This gave room for the comparison of data.

First Phase: Data Analysis (Quantitative Approach)

This aspect of data analysis was done quantitatively using simple frequency tables, percentages and numbers to ascertain the effect of public opinion polls on the political climate of the country.

The tables below provide the demography and psychographic analyses of data collected in the cause of this study.

Table 1: Sex of Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Male	97	62.2%
Female	59	37.8%
Total	156	100%

Table 1 above analysed the sex of respondents. From the table, 97 (62.2%) respondents are male while 57 (37.8%) respondents are female. This result shows that there are more male than female in the sample studied.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Item	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 25	24	15.4%
26 – 35	53	34%
36 – 45	55	35.3%
46 – 55	17	10.9%
Over 55 years	7	4.5%
Total	156	100%

From the table above, 24(15.4%) respondents fall within 18 – 25 years, while 53(34%) respondents fall within 26 – 35 years of age. Whereas 55(35.3%) and 17 (10.9%) respondents fall within the age categories of 36 – 45 and 46- 55 respectively. However, 7 (4.5%) respondents fall within the age bracket of 55 years and above.

This means that majority of the respondents are within the prime age of active service and complete vigour to life endeavours.

Research Question 1: Do Nigerian mass media engaged in public opinion polls during political activities in the country?

Table 3: Respondents view on whether the mass media engaged in public opinion polls during political activities in the country

Do you think the mass media engaged in public opinion polls during political activities in Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	122	78.2%
No	21	13.5%
Can't say	13	8.3%
Total	156	100%

From the table above, 122 (78.2%) respondents agree that the mass media do engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country, while 21 (13.5%) respondents are of the opinion that the mass media do not engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country, whereas 13 (8.3%) respondents are indifferent to whether the mass media do engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country.

This means that the mass media in Nigeria do engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country.

Research Question 2: To what extent do the Nigerian mass media engaged in public opinion polls during the political activities in the country?

Table 4: Respondents view on the extent the mass media engaged in public opinion polls during political activities in the country

To what extent do the Nigerian mass media engaged in public opinion polls during political activities in Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Large extent	12	7.7%
Little extent	136	87.2%
Can't say	8	5.1%
Total	156	100%

From the table above, 12 (7.7%) respondents agree that the extent to which the mass media engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country is large, while 136 (87.2%) respondents are of the opinion that the extent to which that mass media engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country is little, whereas 8 (5.1%) respondents are indifferent as to the extent the mass media do engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country.

Since majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the extent to which the mass media do engage in public opinion polls in the country is low, it therefore means that the extent to which the mass media in Nigeria do engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country is little.

Research Question 3: What level of influence has public opinion polls report by the media on the voting decisions of the electorates?

Table 5: Respondents view on whether public opinion polls reports by the media do have any influence on the voting decisions of the electorates

Do you think any influence on the voting decision of the people can be achieved considering the way opinion polls are reported by the media in Nigeria?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	28	17.9%
No	122	78.2%
Can't say	6	3.8%
Total	156	100%

This table analyses the opinion of electorates on whether media report of public opinion polls can engineer any influence on their voting decision. From the table above, 28 (17.9%) respondents opine that media report of public opinion polls can engineer positive influence on the voting decision of the electorates, while 122 (78.2%) respondents opine that the media report of public opinion polls cannot engineer any influence on the voting decision of the electorates. However, 6 (3.8%) respondents are in different as to whether media report of public opinion polls can engineer any influence on the voting decision of the people.

Invariably, the analysis above shows that media report of public opinion polls as it is in Nigeria today, cannot engineer any influence on the voting decision of the electorates.

Table 6: Respondents view on the level of influence of public opinion polls reports by the media on the voting decisions of the electorates

what is the level of influence?	Frequency	Percentage
High level of influence	5	17.9%
Low level of influence	22	78.6%
Can't say	1	3.6%
Total	28	100%

The table above analyses the opinion of electorates on the level of influence of media report of public opinion polls on the voting decision of the electorates. From the table, 5 (17.9%) respondents opine that the level of influence of media report of public opinion polls on the voting decision of the electorates is high, while 22 (78.6%) respondents opine that the level of influence of media report of public opinion polls on the voting decision of the electorates is low. However, 1 (3.6%) respondent was indifferent as to the level of influence of media report of public opinion polls on the voting decision of the people.

The analysis above indicates that among those who said media report of public opinion polls can engineer influence on the voting decision of the electorates, majority opined that such influence when it occurs, it is very low.

Research Question 4: What are the factors militating against the media in carrying out public opinion polls during the political campaign processes of the country?

Table 7: Respondents view on the factors militating against the media in carrying out public opinion polls during the political processes of the country

What would you say are the factors responsible for these shortcomings?	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of fund for the execution of opinion poll projects.	67	42.9%
Inadequate manpower with the technological know-how on public opinion polling and reports.	56	35.9%
Lack of modern technology for data collection and analysis.	73	46.8%
Absence of the will power by media practitioners to run opinion polls for the development of the political climate.	13	8.3%
The political climate in Nigeria has not seen reasons to have a good opinion polling system.	34	21.8%

Table ten looks at respondents view on the factors responsible for the shortcomings on media engagement and report of public opinion polls in the country. From the table above, 67 (42.9%) respondents opine that one of the factors responsible for the shortcomings on media engagement and report of public opinion polls in the country is lack of fund for the execution of opinion poll projects. Similarly, 56 (35.9%) respondents opined that another factor factors responsible for the shortcomings on media engagement and report of public opinion polls in the country is inadequate manpower with the technological know-how on public opinion polling and reports. In the same vain 73 (46.8%) respondents said the factor factors responsible for the shortcomings on media engagement and report of public opinion polls in the country is lack of modern technology for data collection and analysis; coupled with the response of 13 (8.3%) respondents who opined that the factors responsible for the shortcomings on media engagement and report of public opinion polls in the country is absence of the will power by media practitioners to run opinion polls for the development of the political climate.

However, 34 (21.8%) respondents opined that the political climate in Nigeria has not seen reasons to have a good opinion polling system as one of the factors affecting public opinion polls and report in the country.

Research Question 5: What effect has public opinion polls by the media on the political climate of the country?

Table 12: Respondents view on the effect of public opinion polls by the media on the country's political climate

If yes, what do you think are the effects of public opinion polls by the media on the political climate of the country?	Frequency	Percentage
It would create a political conscious citizens and increase political participation.	43	27.6%
It will provide electorates with additional information that will help their decision making process.	67	42.9%
It will help ameliorate the political vices and malpractices notices in the political culture of the country.	54	34.6%
It will encourage political parties to position themselves better for effective democratic delivery.	33	21.2%
It will encourage credible and honest people to be part of the political pilots of the country's political system.	22	14.1%

Table twelve looks at respondents view on the effects of public opinion polls in the country's political climate. From the table above, 43 (27.6%) respondents opine that one of the effects of public opinion polls in the country is that it would create a political conscious citizens and increase political participation. Similarly, 67 (42.9%) respondents opined that another effect is that it will provide electorates with additional information that will help their decision making process. In the same vain 54 (34.6%) respondents said another effect of public opinion polls in the country is that it will help ameliorate the political vices and malpractices notices in the political culture of the country, while 33 (21.2%) respondents opined that one of the effects of public opinion polls in the country is that it will encourage political parties to position themselves better for effective democratic delivery. However, 22 (14.1%) respondents opined that public opinion polls and report in the country will encourage credible and honest people to be part of the political pilots of the country's political system.

Second Phase: Data Analysis (Qualitative Approach)

In this phase of the analysis, data was analysed using qualitative approach. By this, data were presented in textual forms separately. The study made provision for 18 media practitioners that were interviewed in line with the questions raised in the interview schedule. The first 12 persons were gotten by selecting 2 media practitioners (one editor-in-chief and a senior editor in the state television station (NTA)) from the media houses in the states selected. Then 6 chief editors from the radio corporations in the states selected were also interviewed. In all, three persons were interviewed from each of the states selected. This made the total number of people interviewed for this study to be eighteen (18).

From the interviewed persons, thirteen (13) of them were male while the remaining five (5) were female and they all fall between the age brackets of 39-55 years of age. They have equally attended tertiary institutions with higher degrees as added advantage. They all have access to radio, television newspapers, bill boards, posters and other sources of communication, but prefer television and newspapers as sources of message reception on political matters.

Research Question 1: Do Nigerian mass media engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country?

The interviews conducted in the cause of this study reveals that the Nigerian mass media do engage in public opinion polling as political activities unfold in the country. All the eighteen (18) respondents opined that the mass media do collect cross section of peoples opinion and engage in phone in programmes to enable it elicit information from members of the public. However, they acknowledge that the media do not really map out fund and carry out a well decisive polling system in order to find out other important information that would help political development especially during elections in the country.

This means that the mass media in Nigeria do engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country.

Research Question 2: To what extent do the Nigerian mass media engage in public opinion polls during the political activities in the country?

From the interview, 16 respondents agree that the extent to which the mass media engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country is large, while 2 respondents are of the opinion that the extent to which that mass media engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country is little. It can be said therefore, that since majority of the respondents are of the opinion that the extent to which the mass media do engage in public opinion polls in the country is large; it means that the extent to which the mass media in Nigeria do engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country is large. However, those who opined that the media to a large extent have engaged in public opinion polls further said that the media will need to be more analytical in its presentation of the reports of the opinion polls. According to them, it is only when the media have done good analytical and interpretative report of the result of the polls that the media will say it has done a good job.

While those that said the extent to which the media have fared in opinion polls in the country is little are of the opinion that a total revamping of the opinion polling system in the country by the media has to be considered. They argued that the nature of public opinion polls as it is in the country today is a mere smattering of the opinion polling system.

Research Question 3: What level of influence has public opinion polls report by the media on the voting decisions of the electorates?

This interview conducted in this area, reveals that the level of influence of media report of public opinion polls on the voting decision of the electorates is low. From the interview, 12 respondents opine that the level of influence of media report of public opinion polls on the voting decision of the electorates is low because issues of opinion polls has to do with the belief system of the individual concerned. They argued that it takes belief time to change and that it will take public opinion time to influence the mind frame of the people. The remaining 6 respondents opine that the level of influence of media report of public opinion polls on the voting decision of the electorates cannot be ascertain just like that, they said public opinion polls should first be packet well in a highly persuasive language for it to have the desired result.

The analysis above indicates that among those who said media report of public opinion polls can engineer influence on the voting decision of the electorates, majority opined that such influence when it occurs, it is very low.

Research Question 4: What are the factors militating against the media in carrying out public opinion polls during the political processes of the country?

Analysis of the interview reveals respondents view on the factors responsible for the shortcomings on media engagement and report of public opinion polls in the country. The inhibiting factors were state thus: lack of fund for the execution of opinion poll projects; inadequate manpower with the technological know-how on public opinion polling and reports; and lack of modern technology for data collection and analysis

Research Question 5: What effect has public opinion polls by the media on the political climate of the country?

The interview conducted in respect to respondents view on the effects of public opinion polls in the country's political climate has the following as response from the respondents: public opinion polls will help to create a favourable political environment for the country and ensure good political culture; it would create a political conscious citizens and increase political participation; it will provide electorates with additional information that will help their decision making process; it will help ameliorate the political vices and malpractices noticed in the political culture of the country; it will encourage political parties to position themselves better for effective democratic delivery; and encourage credible and honest people to be part of the political pilots of the country's political system.

Discussion of Findings

In analysing data collected, the study showed that there was higher percentage of men than women in the sample studied. It also revealed that most of the people sampled were educated and falls within 18-55 years of age, which means that they are active citizens contributing to the growth of the economy.

The analysis from both quantitative and qualitative approaches revealed that the mass media in Nigeria did engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country. This is evident from the fact that 122 (78.2%) respondents agreed that the mass media did engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country, while 21 (13.5%) respondents were of the opinion that the mass media did not engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country.

On the qualitative aspect, the interviews conducted in this study revealed that Nigerian mass media did engage in public opinion polls as political activities unfold in the country. All the eighteen (18) respondents rant that the mass media do collect cross section of peoples opinion and take on phone in programmes to enable it elicit information from members of the public. However, they acknowledged that the media do not really map out fund to carry out opinion polls to find out other important information that would help political development especially during elections in the country.

The study further revealed that majority of the respondents was of the opinion that the extent to which the mass media do engage in public opinion polls in the country is low. On the other hand, the qualitative data collected revealed that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the extent to which the mass media do engage in public opinion polls in the country is large. This means that the extent to which the mass media in Nigeria do engage in public opinion polls during political activities in the country was high. Therefore, it can be said that while the electorates rant that the extent to which media engage in public opinion poll in the country was low, the media practitioner believed that the media is doing its best to serve the public in terms of providing results of opinion polls in the country.

In responding to the question of media influence in terms of opinion formation, it was revealed that among those who said media report on public opinion polls can engineer influence on the voting decision of the electorates, majority opined that such influence when it occurs, is usually very low. By extension, it can be said that the influence of public opinion polls on the electorates as it is obtainable today in the country is very low. While this study have argued that the influence of opinion poll on the people is very low, other works revealed in the cause of this study showed that most people do not see themselves as people that should be influenced by opinion polls rather they see it as something that should affect others. Mutz (1989: i) in her study noted that “perceptions of the influence of media reports on others were found to be consistently greater than perceptions of influence on self. She further added that people perceiving divestment as a highly important issue are more likely to ascribe greater media influence to others than to themselves”.

The study also revealed that there are problems existing between the media, the people and public opinion polls in the country. These problems were enumerated as follows: Lack of fund for the execution of opinion poll projects; inadequate manpower with the technological know-how on public opinion polling and reports; lack of modern technology for data collection and analysis; Absence of the will power by media practitioners to run opinion polls for the development of the political climate; and that the political climate in Nigeria has not seen reasons to have a good opinion polling system. This finding happened to be the consensus view from both quantitative and qualitative approach.

The quantitative and qualitative analyses in respect to respondents view on the effects of public opinion polls in the country had the following response: public opinion polls will help to create a favourable political environment for the country and ensure good political culture; it would create a political conscious citizens and increase political participation; it will provide electorates with additional information that will help their decision making process; it will help ameliorate the political vices and malpractices noticed in the political culture of the country; it will encourage political parties to position themselves better for effective democratic delivery; and encourage credible and honest people to be part of the political process of the country's political system.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it is obvious that public opinion polls have significant effect on the political culture of a country. It is therefore, important to note that a country's political culture can be improved and that political consciousness can be awakened by well organised opinion polling system. Nigeria, therefore, as a young and functional democratic country, needs viable media that will on its own embark on public opinion polls during political activities and election matters. In line with the findings in this work, it is important for media organisations in the country to improve on public opinion polls during elections with the aim of sanitising the electoral process in the country.

Recommendations

Media organisations should seize the opportunity of the benefits of public opinion polls to carry out political information that can strengthen the political culture of the people and the electoral system.

Media organisations should not allow themselves to be partisan in their report of public opinion polls result by allowing sponsorship from candidates or political parties. This is to discourage electoral fraud in the outcome of the result from the polling process.

Media organisations should map out fund that would be used to carry out well organised public opinion polls and engage in analytical interpretation of the polls result for the benefit of the people.

Electoral bodies, political parties and aspirants should approach the media in order to obtain useful information that will help logistics and political decisions.

Finally, the media should report accurately the opinion polls.

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