

## INFLUENCE OF THE MASS MEDIA ON VOTERS' BEHAVIOUR DURING THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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### *Abstract*

*The study examined the roles, limitations and influence of the mass media on the behaviours of voter's during the 2015 general elections in Southwest Nigeria. It also investigated the influence of mass media on voters' choice of candidate during the period, with the view to providing information on the strengths and weaknesses of the mass media during the 2015 general elections in the study area. The study adopted primary and secondary data. Three states in South-western Nigeria (Ekiti, Ogun and Osun), were purposively sampled. The primary data were obtained through questionnaire and in-depth interviews. 384 copies of the questionnaire were administered on registered voters in nine local governments of the three States. The in-depth interviews were conducted with six journalists and three senior academics in the Department of Political Science from Obafemi Awolowo University and Ekiti State University, using purposive sampling technique. Data were analysed using content analysis. The study found*

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*that the mass media were able to perform their roles of political awareness and education during the electoral process. The results also showed that the mass media were able to influence the electorates through voters' education prior to election period which contributed to its smooth running. The study concluded that the mass media performed their roles of political education adequately during the 2015 general election in southwestern Nigeria and had the capability of doing much if given the required freedom, safety, and the media practitioners do away with political biases.*

**Keywords:** mass media, voter's behaviour, voter's education, election,

### **Introduction**

**E**lection as a broad concept does not stand as an entity on its own without taking cognizance of some elements which occur in the process. Such elements include, adequate political education, awareness, voters' turnout, voters' choice of candidate, and so on. In the implementation of the above elements, in a democratic election, the mass media play very crucial roles. According to Udende (2011:493), political communication, which utilizes the media, has become incontestably relevant in all democracies. From his view, the mass media directly or indirectly become relevant to the success of a democratic practice in any given state. The mass media are expected to give necessary information to the populace on the importance of election. The media should also checkmate the actions and inactions of elected officials of every given state. This is why they are referred to as the fourth estate of the realm (Akinfeleye, 2003).

The strength of mass media was generated from the general recognition of Fundamental Human Rights, which permits an individual to have access to information, and be able to speak at all times as long as it causes no damage to another person's right. Access to information is the heart of democracy from two different perspectives. One, it ensures that citizens make responsible, and informed choices rather than act ignorantly. Two, information serves a 'checking function', by ensuring that elected repre-

sentatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them (United States Agency for International Development, 1999).

According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), mass media is to serve two major purposes for the survival of democracy in a society. One, it is expected to educate the electorate in making a better decision before and during election. Two, it is to enlighten the citizens on the manner of running government. In view of this, the mass media perform pre-election, election, and post-election duties. Since 1922 when the Clifford constitution introduced elective principle in Nigeria, there had been reasons for electorate, either directly or indirectly to set themselves aside from participating in electoral process due to some challenges such as, suffrage principle, electoral violence and ignorance.

### **Statement of Research Problem**

The mass media, as the fourth estate of the realm, play crucial roles during elections. These include political education and mobilization with the possibility of shaping voters' behaviours. A lot of studies in Nigeria have documented these important roles of the media and their effects on the conduct of elections. However, while most studies have focused on the impact of ownership on the production output of media, not so much has been done to assess the level of influence of the mass media on voters' behaviour in southwestern Nigeria, with specific reference to the 2015 general elections. Hence the need for this study.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are to:

- (i) examine the roles and limitations of the mass media during the 2015 general election in southwestern Nigeria.
- (ii) assess the level of influence of mass media on voters' education during the 2015 general election in southwestern Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

### **Media and Election: Elements of sustainable democracy.**

Liberal democracy centers on the liberty and freedom of the entire citizenry in a democratic society. Among the relevant agents of liberal democracy is election. It is needless to say that such election is expected to be conducted in a free and fair manner so that the citizens can decide who rules them. Invariably, for a hitch-free election process to be well achieved, the mass media with the primary role of giving needed information to the citizens are expected to get involved. Thus, both the media and election are veritable instruments for the sustainability of democracy.

In order to achieve free, fair and credible electoral outcomes, every qualified citizen must be given their constituted proper right to vote (Sandbrook as cited in Ighodalo, 2011). Before the relationships between election and democracy can be said to be productive, it has to meet some essential conditions. These include, empowerment of people to make political choice without hindrance, and the political atmosphere under which the choice is made should be free from threat, intimidation and fear (Ighodalo, 2011). Thus, the electorates must be given necessary information and freedom in choosing who governs them. Sandbrook went further to say that the practice of choosing political leaders should go hand-in-hand with the cultural values of the people.

Election can only be meaningful when it is properly conducted. Thus, for proper conduct of election, it should be free and fair. In order to achieve this, the media are expected to play their roles so that the whole world could measure the activities of other bodies such as; the security, domestic or foreign observers, and other election monitoring bodies. The media give interested parties an unparalleled chance to express their feelings on the pre-election, election and post election matters ((Rosen, 1999; Amadi 2013; Butler, 2006). The media as the fourth estate of the realm are saddled with the responsibility of being the voice of the voiceless, speaking the mind of citizens based on truth, and being seen by the citizens as a body which knows all. Based on these assumptions, the media should be trusted by their audience. According to Amadi (2013:163), the mass media are critical to the success or failure of the attainment interest of the ruling class.

The media and election obviously became interconnected as elements needed for a sustainable democracy. The fall of the media amounts to the fall of electoral success, which will directly weaken if not destroy the democratic standard of such society.

The mass media are the backbone of democracy. The media supply the political information that voters base their decisions upon. They are the watchdogs that electorates rely to uncover wrong doings of those in government. The media are therefore required to perform up to the standard with respect to the deepening of the democratic process (Venturelli, 1998, & McQuail, 1993). In a democratic society, the mass media play a very essential role of ensuring that information that are vital to the existence, survival and development of constituents is availed to them in a timely, equitable, fair and balanced manner (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2015). A free and fair election is not only about casting a vote, but is also about having adequate information about parties, policies, candidates and the election process itself so that voters can make an informed choice. A democratic election with no media freedom would be a contradiction of purpose.

### **Roles of Mass Media in Election**

The success of an election lies not only on the electoral umpire. The basic role of the mass media in electoral process is to enlighten and educate the public and act as a neutral, objective platform for conveying non-biased electoral information (Cairo Institute for Human Right Studies, 2011).

According to the Electoral Commission of Zambia, ECZ (2015), the media's roles towards the success of election are to serve as watchdog, voters' education and peace building. From ECZ (2015) perspective, the watchdog role can be said to be played when they help the citizens to know the contestants, political parties and the agents of government saddled with the duties of conducting election. Media also alert citizens on electoral malpractice. Voter's education is the proper enlightenment given to the voters, most especially before the election. This role is being played by answering some fundamental questions; why should the citizens participate in the election? How should the citizens vote during the election?

According to Lasswell (as cited in Olayiwola, 1991), three functions are identified as being performed by the mass media, namely, surveillance of the world to report on-going events, interpretation of the meaning of events, and socialization of individuals into their cultural settings. The manner in which these functions are performed, it is argued, affects the lives of individuals, groups, and social organizations, as well as the course of domestic and international politics. The surveillance role of the media, according to Dominick (2013), can be subdivided into the warning or beware surveillance associated with the news media giving information about pending threats and the instrumental surveillance associated with both news and popular media which include the transmission of useful information. Surveillance role can be performed before, during and after the election period. Enlightenment of the electorates on how to go about election through jingles or adverts can be considered to be instrumental surveillance, while information most especially during, and after the election in case of electoral violence can be referred to as a warning surveillance.

In the same vein, the interpretation role of the media goes a long way in the minds of the majority in a different direction. This function is often being displayed during the campaign exercise; the media do quote most candidates or political parties and try to dissect these statements as objectively and impartial as possible. The interpretation function of the mass media has made it so easy for the media to assist or show support for a particular candidate or political party. Thus, it is clear that the mass media, as a socializing agent, perform critical role (Hyman, 1963). Socialization is the process of transferring the culture of the society from one generation to the other. Sometimes, the media consciously try to instill values into the audience (Dominick, 2013:37). From the perspective of election, instilling electoral values becomes a special and important function that must be performed by the media as frequently as possible, irrespective of the numbers of times a country had conducted elections. The expected roles of the mass media also include making reports of happenings at different polling units. In performing this function, mass media can be incapacitated by the security agents to the detriment of those hearing the information.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used in this study is the Agenda-Setting Theory. The concept of agenda setting took its name from the idea that the mass media have the ability to report salient issues on their news agenda and transfer them to the members of the public. Usually, journalists deal with news in several important ways. First, they decide which news to report and which to ignore. The newspapers, for instance, clearly reveal the journalistic preference of an item through its page placement, headline and length. Agenda-setting describes the transmission of these saliencies as one of the most important aspects of the media (Funkhouser 1973).

The main thrust of the agenda-setting theory is not only in the power of the media in the determination of what the public should know and what they should not know, but to ensure that the public have something to think about. The knowledge about every corner of the world today is being made easily available by the mass media. Any information not considered necessary or less necessary to be broadcast become unknown to the public except those with direct access to such information. What we know about the world is largely based on what the media decide to tell us (McComb, 1972).

Proponents of the agenda-setting theory, McComb and Shaw (1972:178) are of the view that in choosing and displaying news; editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play important roles in shaping political reality. We live in a world where millions of events take place simultaneously. Media organizations have responsibilities to observe those events and report them (Riaz, as cited in Chibuike & Fafiolu, 2015). It is only when the media place importance on some issues that they become meaningful to the masses (Agba, as cited in Okunna, 2002). The news media tell us which issues are important and which ones are not. The media inform us daily about the latest events and changes in the world beyond our reach. One of such issues in all societies is the success of the electoral process.

The Agenda-setting theory is therefore considered for this research in order to assess what the media take as their priority in the process of performing their functions as the fourth estate of the realm. The voters

often turn to their electronic media or purchase a newspaper or magazine for information that relates to the election. The media are equally willing to ensure information are disseminated to their audience. The 2015 general election in Nigeria was one of the notable events that got the full attention of the mass media in the society. The media during the 2015 general election directly or indirectly ran several jingles to caution acts of violence. Likewise, several broadcasting media programmes focused more on educating and enlightening the electorates on how to go about the process of election as well as getting necessary information or the contestants to choose on the day of election. Notable among such media programmes are Sunrise Daily on Channels Television, as well as Political platform on Raypower fm. This theory shall therefore guide the study to see if the expectation of the media towards a successful 2015 general elections was placed at the top agenda or otherwise.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a survey research design. It used two research instruments which are; structured questionnaire and in-depth interview. The questionnaire was self developed and has four sections. Section A solicited bio-data information of the respondents such as state of residence, local government of residence, age, sex, marital status, educational qualification and occupation. Section B consisted of items that elicited information on the roles and limitations of the mass media during the 2015 general elections in southwestern Nigeria. Its Section C consisted of items that elicited information on mass media and voters' education during the 2015 general election in southwestern Nigeria, while it's Section D consisted of items on the level of influence of the mass media on voters' choice during the 2015 general election. The options of choice range from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D).

The population for the study consisted of all voters in the 2015 general election in South-western Nigeria. The random sampling method was employed to pick Ekiti, Ogun, and Osun states for the study. The respondents for the questionnaire were also randomly selected from one (1) local governments in each of the three senatorial districts of selected states.



Relying on the position of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) on sampling, the researchers used confident level of 95% with 5% margin of error to arrive at picking 384 sample size used for the questionnaire. This was based on the information on the registration of voters' by the Independent National Electoral Commission as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Population of registered voters in Southwestern Nigeria**

<b>State</b>	<b>Registered Voters</b>
<b>Ekiti</b>	732,021
<b>Lagos</b>	5,822,207
<b>Ogun</b>	1,829,534
<b>Ondo</b>	1,524,655
<b>Osun</b>	1,407,102
<b>Oyo</b>	2,415,566
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,731,085</b>

**Source:** Independent National Electoral Commission ([www.inec.ng.com](http://www.inec.ng.com)), 2017

The total of 384 copies of questionnaire was administered in the nine local governments randomly chosen from the nine senatorial districts of the three randomly selected states. Each state was sampled based on the proportional sampling technique; Ekiti with 64, Ogun with 192, and Osun with 128 copies of the questionnaire.

**Table 2: The distribution of sample state and local government area of study**

State	Local Government Area	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Ekiti</b>	Oye	21	5.5
	Ado	22	5.7
	Ikere	21	5.5
<b>Ogun</b>	Abeokuta North	64	16.7
	Sagamu	64	16.7
	Egbado South	64	16.7
<b>Osun</b>	Osogbo	43	11.2
	Ife-Central	43	11.2
	Ede South	42	10.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>384</b>	<b>100</b>

The questionnaire was administered to those who had access to one type of media or the other, the researcher got this done by targeting places like higher institutions, ministries, churches and social elite gatherings. Three hundred and eighty-four (384) copies of the questionnaire were distributed and collected back by the research assistants, who waited to collect the questionnaires on the spot. The study made use of simple percentage to analyze the results.

The second instrument is the in-depth interview. This employed the use of interview guide with eight (8) questions that sought to corroborate or reject the responses chosen by the respondents on the questionnaire. In depth interviews were conducted with six journalists and three senior academics using purposive sampling. The journalists were chosen because of their involvement in the 2015 general election and the senior academics were chosen because of their expertise in the political behaviour.

### Presentation of Results

This segment presents and discusses the results arising from interviews conducted and questionnaire sampled on respondents.

**Table 3: Roles Mass Media performed during the 2015 general elections and Limitations faced**

S/N	Item	S.A % (F)	A % (F)	U % (F)	S.D % (F)	D % (F)
1	Mass media covered election campaigns efficiently	49.7 (191)	33.3 (128)	8.6 (33)	0.8 (3)	7.6 (29)
2	Mass media gave all political parties equal opportunities	18.0 (69)	3.9 (15)	2.9 (11)	15.4 (59)	59.9 (230)
3	Mass media were restricted from covering some happenings/events in polling units	33.3 (128)	0.8 (3)	8.6 (33)	49.7 (191)	7.6 (29)
4	Restriction of movement saddled on security agents affected the mass media during 2015 general election	4.4 (17)	3.4 (13)	1.6 (6)	50.5 (194)	40.1 (154)
5	Incumbent government/political party restricted mass media freedom in their (political party) advantage	16.4 (63)	32.6 (125)	16.9 (65)	16.7 (64)	12.4 (67)
6	Report given by the media from polling units were just and bias free	28.9 (111)	37.2 (143)	8.3 (32)	3.1 (12)	22.4 (86)
7	The mass media played a significant role in creating political awareness and dissemination of information	50.5 (194)	40.1 (154)	1.6 (6)	4.4 (17)	3.4 (13)

***Statement 1: Mass media covered election campaigns efficiently***

From Table 3 above, 191 respondents represented by 49.7% strongly agreed, 128 respondents represented by 33.3% agreed to the statement that the mass media covered elections campaign efficiently while 29 respondents represented by 7.6% disagreed and only 3 respondents represented by 0.8% strongly disagree to the same statement.

***Statement 2: Mass media gave all political parties equal opportunities***

Only 69 respondents represented by 18.0% strongly agreed that mass media gave all political parties equal opportunities, while 59 respondents represented by 15.4% and 230 respondents represented by 59.9% respectively strongly disagreed and disagreed to the statement that equal opportunities were given to all parties during the 2015 general elections.

***Statement 3: Mass media were restricted from covering some happenings/events in polling units***

The mass media got high level of freedom with their coverage level during the election as drawn from Table 3 because 191 respondents represented by 49.7% and 29 respondents represented by 7.6% respectively strongly disagreed and disagreed to the statement that the media were not allowed to cover happenings in polling units, while 128 respondents represented by 33.3% and 3 respondents represented by 0.8% respectively strongly agreed and agreed to the statement.

***Statement 4: Restriction of movement saddled on security agents affected the mass media during the 2015 general election***

Table 3 also showed only 17 respondents represented by 4.4% and 13 respondents represented by 3.4% strongly agreed and disagreed respectively to the statement that the media were restricted by the security agents during the 2015 general election, while 194 respondents represented by 50.5% and 154 respondents represented by 40.1% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively to the statement. Generally, only 7.8% agreed and 90.6% disagreed while 1.6% had no decision on the

statement that the mass media were restricted during the election period in southwestern, Nigeria.

***Statement 5: Incumbent government/political party restricted mass media freedom in their (political party) advantage***

Table 3 showed 63 respondents represented by 16.4% and 64 respondents represented by 16.7% strongly agreed and disagreed respectively to the statement that incumbent government restricted mass media freedom to their advantage, while 125 respondents represented by 32.6% and 67 respondents represented by 12.4% strongly disagreed and disagreed to the same statement. It showed that majority of participants in the study constituting 32.6% strongly disagreed that the then ruling party restricted the freedom of press.

***Statement 6: Report given by the media from polling units were just and bias-free***

Table 3 also revealed that 66.1%, majority of the respondents; agreed to the statement that the report given by the media from polling units were just and bias-free as 111 respondents represented by 28.9% and 64 respondents represented by 37.2% strongly agreed and agreed respectively, while only 12 respondents represented by 3.1% and 86 respondents represented by 22.4% respectively strongly disagreed and disagreed to the same statement.

***Statement 7: The mass media played a significant role in creating political awareness and dissemination of information***

Table 3 also indicated that 194 respondents represented by 50.5% and 154 respondents represented by 40.1% strongly agreed and agreed respectively to the statement that the media did play a role of political awareness and information dissemination, while only 17 respondents represented by 4.4% and 13 respondents represented by 3.4% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively.

### **Mass Media and Voters' Education**

Voters' education is the enlightenment of the electorate on why and how they should vote. Encouragement of voters turn out is part of educating the electorates on why it is important for them to participate in making a choice of who will rule them. In the same vein, avoiding any act of violence is another education. Voters can be educated on the dangers of vote buying by the politicians. The 2015 general election added a new education content to the generally known ones with the introduction of card readers.

Mass media are important means through which people get aware and acquire deep knowledge of a political system (Omotoso, 2007:210). In the process of playing their role in passing information to the electorates during election, the mass media are expected to sharpen the behaviour of voters in order to have a successful election. Voting behaviour includes; why do voters vote for who they voted? How do voters vote? How well do voters vote? In order for all these questions to turn out positive for the society, the mass media are expected to play a crucial role in electoral process. This they do sharpening the citizens thinking having been informed about each candidate's, in order to organize and conduct themselves during the exercise. Lipmann (1922) described the mass media as the creator of *the picture on our head*.

The Nigerian election was described by the immediate former Independent National Electoral Commission chairman, Prof Attahiru Jega (Weekend Observer, 2014.) as characterized by rigging, violence, and voided ballots as a result of wrong marking, apathy, as well as sales and buying of votes. The above are poor voting behaviours. It is observed that; there is no doubt that a well-articulated and effectively delivered voters' education could make a positive difference. This study therefore placed mass media side by side with other organization to assess if it was the mass media that actually turned the table around for the electorates in understanding what is necessary or whether the media has given away their responsibilities in totality.

The study therefore presents the following questions for analysis and interpretations.

**Table 4: Mass Media Influence on Voters' Education**

S/N	Item	S.A %	A %	U %	S.D %	D %
		(F)	(F)	(F)	(F)	(F)
8	The media persuaded voters to vote through enlightenment messages/news	31.0 (119)	38.8 (49)	13.5 (52)	7.6 (29)	9.1 (35)
9	Voter' education was gotten more from other organized body and interpersonal communication than via mass media	25.8 (99)	26.0 (100)	19.8 (76)	14.8 (57)	13.5 (52)
10	Education on how to use card reader during 2015 general election was majorly done by the mass media	26.5 (102)	31.3 (120)	3.6 (14)	12.8 (49)	25.8 (99)
11	Mass media was one of the electoral agents that aided smooth and fair elections exercise due to the education given to the electorates prior election day	22.1 (85)	33.3 (128)	16.1 (62)	13.3 (51)	15.1 (58)
12	Nigeria media increased hate speeches more, during the 2015 general elections	13.0 (50)	14.8 (57)	4.9 (19)	50.5 (194)	16.7 (64)
13	Voters education was majorly gotten from the mass media during the 2015 general elections	23.2 (89)	41.4 (159)	12.8 (49)	10.2 (39)	12.5 (48)
14	Education given by mass media was done without bias	14.5 (56)	34.9 (134)	16.1 (62)	17.7 (68)	16.7 (64)

**Statement 8: The media persuaded voters to vote through enlightenment messages/news**

From Table 4 above, 119 respondents represented by 31.0% and 49 respondents represented by 38.8% strongly agreed and agreed respectively to the statement that the media persuaded voters to vote through enlightenment messages/news, while only 29 respondents represented by 7.6% and 35 respondents represented by 9.1% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. Thus, the highest percentage of researcher's respondents agreed to the positive effect of the media enlightenment messages.

**Statement 9: Voter' education was gotten more from other organized body and interpersonal communication than via mass media**

Table 4 also revealed that 99 respondents represented by 25.8% and 100 respondents represented by 26.0% strongly agreed and agreed to the statement that other organized body did more political education than the media, while only 57 respondents represented by 14.8% and 32 respondents represented by 13.5% strongly disagreed and disagreed on same question. Of note, 76 respondents represented by 19.8% could not decide on whether the statement has correct or not.

**Statement 10: Education on how to use card reader during 2015 general election was majorly done by the mass media**

As part of voters' education, which card reader usage is among, especially as it was the first time it was used in Nigeria, there was a question on its use in the questionnaire. Table 1V shows 102 respondents represented by 26.5% and 120 respondents represented by 31.3% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the media did give education to voters on the use of card reader, while only 49 respondents represented by 12.8% and 99 respondents represented by 25.8% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively on the same statement.



***Statement 11: Mass media was one of the electoral agents that aided smooth and fair elections exercise due to the education given to the electorate prior to the election day***

From Table 4 above, 85 respondents represented by 22.1% and 128 respondents represented by 33.3% strongly agreed and agreed respectively to the assertion that the media was one of the agents that did make sure enough education was given to avoid or reduce violence during the 2015 general election, while only 51 respondents represented by 13.3% and 58 respondents represented by 15.1% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively to the same question.

***Statement 12: The Nigeria media increased hate speeches more, during 2015 general elections***

From Table 4, only 50 respondents represented by 13.0% and 57 respondents represented by 14.8% strongly agreed and agreed to the statement that the mass media increased hate speeches during the 2015 general elections, while 194 respondents represented by 50.5% and 64 respondents represented by 16.7% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively.

***Statement 13: Voters education was majorly gotten from the mass media during the 2015 general elections***

Table 4 also indicated that 89 respondents represented by 23.2% and 159 respondents represented by 41.4% strongly agreed and agreed to the statement that voters' education was done or gotten majorly from the mass media, while 39 respondents represented by 10.2% and 48 respondents represented by 12.5% strongly disagreed and disagreed on the same statement.

***Statement 14: Education given by mass media was done without bias***

From Table 4 above, 56 respondents represented by 14.5% and 134 respondents represented by 34.9% strongly agreed and agreed to the statement that education given by the media was done without bias, while

68 respondents represented by 17.7% and 64 respondents represented by 16.7% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. Thus, it's one thing for the media to give voters' education, it's obviously another thing for that education not to be biased in nature.

### **Discussion**

The first objective in this study examined the roles and limitations of the mass media during the 2015 general election in southwestern Nigeria. From the data gathered, majority of the respondents were of the view that the media did perform their roles before, during, and after the election and with the high level of freedom compared to previous elections. The roles they performed include; covering of campaign programmes, political awareness and dissemination of information, though with some limitations such as; media throwing support at a political party and being antagonistic to one another. The capability of the mass media was also reiterated by Mr Abdul-Rashid, a journalist, who revealed in an interview that the role of the mass media was very helpful to change opinions and ideologies of the electorates. Professor Femi Omotoso, of Ekiti State University, on his own, reiterated the special role the electronic media particularly the television and radio played to educate the voters.

This can be seen in the work of Nuhu and As'mau (2015) who noted that "quite a number of advertisements were aired by some electronic media such as the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the African Independent Television (AIT) Networks and in other television stations owned by the federating states that depicted General (as was then addressed) Muhammadu Buhari in bad light to the public". Nuhu and As'mau went further to clarify that any form of partiality "...should not be seen as being partial as if there were no negative commentaries about Goodluck Jonathan, which, as expected, the press should have carried as well".

Looking critically into the outlines of ace electoral knowledge network (2016) on the roles media should play in election, it can be said that the Nigeria mass media did play their part. The outlines include allowing political parties and candidates to engage in debates with each other. Secondly, the media should be able to give report of results and monitor vote

counting, and lastly the media should provide a platform for the public to communicate their concerns, opinions and needs to the parties and candidates. All these were done by the media before and during the 2015 general election. There was a debate organized by the National Broadcasting Commission when invitation was given to all candidates contesting for the presidency as well as their running mates. The media followed vote counting and gave reports openly through prominent media networks in the country. The social media is not an exception in this function as it was even said to have done well in the area of result announcement from each polling unit across the federation. Prior to the 2015 general election, virtually all mass media, especially the electronics media, had several programmes that allowed voters to express their minds on election and candidature of political parties. Such issues like the; introduction of smart card reader, postponement of election, use of military men during the election and so on were debated across several divides.

Likewise, Lasswell (as cited in Olayiwola, 1991) identified three roles of the mass media which include; surveillance, interpretation and socialization. All the three roles were performed before, during and after the 2015 general election in southwestern Nigeria. The surveillance role was performed as an average Nigerian could sit in the corner of his room and understand the situation of things across the polling units. The interpretation role involves the media covering election campaigns and quoting the candidate's word and buttress it into becoming a topic of the town. Under this role performance, partiality was in display as each media house dwelt more on a candidate's words or speech and overlook another depending on which political party/candidate such media outfit belongs to. Lastly, the socialization role was performed as the Nigerian media used almost all programmes to enlighten the populace on how to go about elections and also how to avert violence.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations to the roles of the mass media. Mass media, according to the Ace Electoral Knowledge Network (2016) are expected to provide information that would avoid inflammatory language and help to prevent election-related violence. The above expected role was not properly managed either directly from the media or the par-

ticipants on electoral programs on electronic media. Nuhu and Asmau (2015) identified some of these provocative statements such as: "Buhari shall die in Office," which was noticed in a paid advertisement in a number of newspapers and other such provocative outbursts by the Governor of Ekiti State, Ayo Fayose. "Buhari is brain dead," by Patience Goodluck Jonathan on a campaign trail and lots more. Putting the limitation of the mass media during election in a different way, Dr. Ola Abegunde, a lecturer at Ekiti State University, observed that most of the mass media were owned by politicians, and as a result, could only disseminate information that suit their owners. In the same vein, Professor Femi Mimiko, at Obafemi Awolowo University, identified dissemination of information as a notable role that was performed by the mass media during the 2015 general election in southwestern Nigeria but observed that most of them are hindered from doing so because of their political biases. While discussing the limitations on the media, Professor Omotoso reiterated that the level of performance of the media in discharging their functions was limited by the environment. According to him, the mass media were more employed in cities than villages.

The second objective assessed the level of influence of the mass media on voters' education during the 2015 general election in southwestern Nigeria. Majority of the respondents agreed that the mass media gave enough and satisfactory education to the voters before the election. In order to ascertain the level of education given during the election, the researcher compared the role played by the mass media and other civil society groups. From the findings; individual, political parties, civil society groups and the media made significant efforts to educate voters during the 2015 general election in southwestern Nigeria. However, mass media played more prominent roles in this regard. This is because, most information were communicated to the third party through the media. As the civil societies and political parties were busy educating, they all made use of the mass media as a channel in order to educate the larger public. In an interview with Mr Kunle Isaac, a journalist from Ekiti State Broadcasting Corporation, he noted that the mass media touched on all aspects of political education from how to vote, what to expect while using the card reader, and why the voters needed to troop out in large number to vote. Professor

Mimiko expressed a contrary view by stating that the mass media could have done more but for their support for political parties or candidates. According to him, if the voters have confidence on the mass media, they are strong instrument of electoral education. No wonder why Akinwalere (2015) remarked that people depend largely on the mass media to create image and form opinions on issues, programmes, leaders, parties, groups, communities and so on. Mr Agboola Samuel, a journalist with Ogun State Television corroborated the strong influence of the mass media when he reiterated that the kind of freedom the media enjoy in a particular society determines the extent they carry out their expected political education function. This was construed differently by Mr Ishola Victor who observed that the mass media's level of delivery of their electioneering functions is determined by the issue of the security of media men while on the field. Thus, when journalists feel safe, their function of providing education during election is done with ease.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The media played prominent roles to ensure a free and fair election via education of voters, during the 2015 general election in southwestern Nigeria. The freedom granted the media by the government could be said to be a contributory factor that enhanced the performance of the role. Like the mass media, political parties, civil society organizations and interpersonal communication equally contributed to the education of the voters as to how to vote and the choice of their candidates/political parties. Therefore, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, the mass media are the most widely recognized channel that gave political education to the electorates in southwestern Nigeria during the 2015 general election

Going by the findings of this study, the following recommendations are important. The media should be given more freedom by the incumbent power holders in order to be able to perform their responsibilities. Journalists should try to be fair to all political parties and candidates during electioneering processes. Any media house that is found wanting in the ethics of media profession as regards electioneering matters should be sanctioned by the appropriate court of law. There should be provisions

adequate for security to safeguard the lives of media practitioners against attacks during elections. Political education should be continuous and should not be only during general elections alone. Continuous education will prepare the electorate and guide them against any form of political manipulation.

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