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Hybrid Political Marketing and Election Outcome: An Assessment of Cycles Nigerian Gubernatorial Elections

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Abstract- Cycle elections in Nigeria are not merely temporal phenomena but are characterized by significant political realignments that reshape the partisan composition of state governments. This study examines the influence of hybrid political marketing strategies on election outcomes in Nigeria's gubernatorial cycle elections across Edo, Ondo, and Osun States. Adopting a comparative case study design, the research surveyed 1,200 registered voters (400 per state) using multi-stage cluster sampling, with data collected through structured questionnaires measuring voter exposure to marketing strategies and perceptions of electoral integrity. Findings reveal that traditional media remain dominant in terms of posters/billboards (88%), radio jingles (84.3%), and rallies (78.3%), while WhatsApp (69.7%) emerged as the most effective digital platform. Voter turnout declined consistently: Edo recorded 25.2% (2020) to 22.08% (2024); Ondo declined from 32% (2020) to 24.8% (2024); while Osun increased marginally from 42.2% (2022) to 43.2% (2026). Only 28% of respondents believe their votes count, and 24% trust INEC, reflecting an electoral efficacy crisis. This study concludes hybrid political marketing, integrated with grassroots mobilization and institutional transparency, can enhance electoral participation, thereby recommends integrated communication strategies, strengthened electoral integrity, allowing the will of electorate to prevails and regulated off-cycle campaign conduct.

Keywords- Hybrid Political Marketing, Voter Engagement, Electoral Efficacy, Gubernatorial Elections, Off-Cycle Elections

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I. Introduction

Electoral ability to carry along political gladiators, parties, and electorates in Nigeria is fundamentally anchored on the strategic communication of ideas, images, and symbols as mechanisms for mobilization, persuasion, and democratic legitimacy (Osuagwu, 2008). This tripartite engagement underscores the primacy of political marketing as the linchpin of electoral participation, wherein communication functions not merely as a transmission mechanism but as a constitutive element of voter trust and institutional credibility. Adeyemi (2026) contends that the electoral marketing system is inherently characterized by an engagement-participation gap, which implies information disorder and mal-information constitutes a systemic externality of competitive political mobilization. Bello (2026) further affirms that narrative clarity, emotional resonance, and credibility of campaign messages are critical determinants of electoral outcomes. These perspectives affirm that communication remains the unifying thread binding political actors and citizens, shaping electoral behavior and democratic consolidation in Nigeria's evolving political landscape.

In Nigeria, the change toward political communication paradigms have witnessed a significant shift from conventional to hybrid models integrating both conventional and digital approaches. This paradigmatic shift has been particularly pronounced in gubernatorial elections, where the stakes are high and the electorate increasingly diverse and discerning. The convergence of conventional campaign mechanisms rallies, posters, radio jingles, door-to-door canvassing with digital platforms including social media, targeted messaging, and data-driven audience segmentation has fundamentally altered the dynamics of voter engagement and electoral participation (Odiboh, 2026).

Political marketing, a concept that has long served as the linchpin of democratic electoral contests, involves the strategic application of traditional marketing principles—where the candidate is the "product," the "price" is the electorate's trust, and the "place" encompasses communication channels to persuade citizens, a practice now critically challenged in Nigeria by the rise of transactional vote-buying phenomena such as "Temporary Loyalty Purchases" . Concurrently, Nwodo, Onyeokoro, Dike, Anyaogu, and Awaeze (2025) have broadened this perspective, in that political

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marketing is a tool that thrives within a democratic dispensation governed by the rule of law, significantly shaping voter perceptions and decisions through campaign messages, media representation, and political branding, while also highlighting the persistent gap between campaign promises and the implementation of welfare policies. Azeez and Ajisafe (2026), argued that political marketing and image-making have transformed into defining features of Nigeria's democratic process, particularly during the 2023 general elections, where the adoption of marketing logics rooted in advertising, branding, and influencer culture that has redefined political participation and representation, often privileging image over ideology and emotion over deliberation

The 2019 gubernatorial elections represented a watershed moment in Nigeria's political marketing landscape. During this period, campaigns predominantly relied on traditional methods such as rallies, posters, radio jingles, door-to-door canvassing, and face-to-face mobilization, which reinforced party loyalty, personality politics, and ethno-regional affiliations, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas (Odiboh, 2026). Whereas, in 2023 gubernatorial elections, however, there was a notable shift toward digital strategies, including social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram), targeted messaging, influencer endorsements, and data-driven audience segmentation (Koech, Akinyemi-Oke, Okoye, and Molnár 2025). This hybridization of political marketing strategies reflects a growing recognition that effective voter engagement requires a multi-channel approach that reaches voters across different platforms. Coupled with the regional colorations introduced in gubernatorial elections, where candidates must navigate diverse geopolitical zones with varying cultural, economic, and political dynamics. This regional variation demands that hybrid political marketing strategies be contextually adapted to resonate with local sensibilities and address specific regional concerns.

Voter engagement encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of citizen participation in the electoral process. Adeyemi (2026) argued that the engagement-participation gap in Nigeria is an emergent property of the electoral marketing system rather than a failure of individual campaigns, identifying information disorder as a systemic externality of competitive mobilization. This perspective positions voter engagement as fundamentally shaped by the quality and credibility of

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political communication, rather than merely voter characteristics. The implication is that addressing voter apathy requires not only improving voter education but also transforming the political marketing ecosystem to reduce misinformation and enhance communication credibility.

The cyclical nature of gubernatorial elections in Nigeria held every four years across the 36 states provides a unique opportunity to assess the evolution and effectiveness of hybrid political marketing strategies across multiple electoral cycles. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reported that only 26.72% of registered voters participated in the 2023 presidential election, a sharp decline from 34.74% in 2019 and 52.26% in 1999 (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2026). This decline in voter turnout reflects diminishing electoral efficacy, attributable to perceived electoral irregularities, weak institutional trust, and the disconnect between campaign messaging and citizens' lived realities. The Guardian editorial (2026) argues that repeated experiences of disputed results, judicial reversals, vote-buying, logistical failures, and allegations of manipulation have weakened trust in the electoral process, making voter registration an increasingly empty ritual.

The digital divide remains a persistent challenge to hybrid political marketing effectiveness in Nigeria. While digital platforms have demonstrated potential in mobilizing urban youth and disillusioned voters seeking candidate competence over partisan loyalty, the digital divide limiting online reach in rural areas, misinformation proliferation, vote-buying, voter apathy, and security concerns continue to impede electoral participation. The technological failures experienced during the 2023 elections, particularly the IReV portal challenges that stopped updating for hours during collation, further eroded public trust and contributed to the perception that electoral outcomes are predetermined.

This study examines the influence of hybrid political marketing strategies on voter engagements in Nigeria's gubernatorial elections across multiple cycles. By integrating traditional and digital campaign approaches, hybrid political marketing offers a pathway to re-engage disenchanted voters, enhance voter readiness, and strengthen the credibility of Nigeria's electoral system.

Specific Objectives

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- To examine the influence of hybrid political marketing on voter engagement in Nigeria's gubernatorial elections.
- To assess the effect of voter engagement on electoral participation in Nigeria's gubernatorial elections.
- To determine the influence of hybrid political marketing on electoral efficacy in Nigeria's gubernatorial elections.
- To ascertain the mediating role of voter engagement in the relationship between hybrid political marketing and electoral efficacy.

Conceptual Review

This section explicates the core concepts underpinning the study, drawing on Nigerian scholarship.

Hybrid Political Marketing

Hybrid political marketing represents the strategic convergence of traditional campaign instruments and digital platforms. Odiboh (2026), in a comparative study of political campaign strategies in Benin City, established that the 2019 elections predominantly relied on traditional methods such as rallies, posters, radio jingles, door-to-door canvassing, and face-to-face mobilization, which reinforced party loyalty, personality politics, and ethno-regional affiliations, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. There was a notable shift toward digital strategies, including social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram), targeted messaging, influencer endorsements, and data-driven audience segmentation, which effectively mobilized urban youth and disillusioned voters seeking transparency, reform, and candidate competence over party identity (Odiboh, 2026).

Koech, Akinyemi-Oke, Okoye, and Molnár (2025) confirmed that an integrated approach combining social media, traditional media, rallies, and personal endorsements is key to successful political mobilisation and voter engagement. Their empirical investigation of Nigerian gubernatorial elections revealed significant links between candidates' communication tools and strategies and voters' awareness, attitudes, and voting choices. This hybrid nature reflects the broader integration of marketing principles into electoral processes, where political actors adopt strategic

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communication techniques to position themselves and their parties as appealing "products," while voters are treated as discerning "consumers" whose support must be earned (Koech et al., 2025).

Voter Engagement

Voter engagement represents a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of citizen participation in the electoral process. Adeyemi (2026) developed the Electoral Marketing System (EMS), which conceptualizes elections as market-like systems and posits that the engagement-participation gap in Nigeria is an emergent property of the electoral marketing system rather than a failure of individual campaigns, identifying information disorder as a systemic externality of competitive mobilization. This perspective positions voter engagement as fundamentally shaped by the quality and credibility of political communication, rather than merely voter characteristics.

Conceptually, storytelling is a multidimensional communication strategy composed of specific attributes that determine its effectiveness: clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, and reliability (credibility) of campaign messages. Bello's empirical investigation of the 2019 Kwara State elections, which ended the long-standing political dominance of the Saraki family, established that clarity of campaign messages significantly influenced demographic support, margin of victory, and voter turnout. Emotional connections significantly influenced voter turnout and margin of victory, while reliability and credibility significantly influenced voter turnout and demographic support. These findings demonstrate that strategic storytelling through clear, consistent, and emotionally engaging narratives shaped electoral outcomes, reinforcing the importance of narrative quality and message consistency in hybrid political marketing effectiveness.

Electoral Efficacy

The citizens' belief that their participation in the electoral process meaningfully influences political outcomes and governance quality. Chiamogu and Chiamogu (2026) examined patterns of political participation in the 2015, 2019 and 2023 presidential elections, revealing a consistent decline in voter turnout driven by widespread disillusionment, poor institutional credibility, and the perception that elections seldom

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influence governance outcomes. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) reported that only 26.72% of registered voters participated in the 2023 presidential election, a sharp decline from 34.74% in 2019 and 52.26% in 1999 (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2026). The erosion of electoral efficacy is attributable to multiple factors reflects systemic distrust, perceived electoral irregularities, and the disconnect between campaign messaging and citizens' lived realities. However, Nigeria's electoral history is littered with disputed results, violence, logistical failures, vote-buying, voter intimidation and allegations of manipulation. The 2007 general election remains one of the darkest chapters in that history, while the disputed 2023 presidential election further deepened public anxiety over the reliability of electoral technology and result transmission.

Gubernatorial Election Cycles

The Nigeria's gubernatorial cycle is the off-cycle phenomenon, wherein eight states conduct their gubernatorial elections outside the general election season. FactSpace West Africa (2026) explains that these off-cycle states including Anambra, Bayelsa, Edo, Ekiti, Osun, and Ondo vote in different years due to legal disputes that have altered elected officials' specified tenures. This creates a staggered cyclical pattern where gubernatorial elections occur in different years across different states, prolonging the political marketing season and creating distinct voter engagement opportunities. The electoral cycle represents a fundamental structural feature of the country's federal democratic system, encompassing the periodic selection of state chief executives across Nigeria's 36 states. The cycle reflects the temporal rhythm, institutional arrangements, and constitutional frameworks that govern the conduct, timing, and recurrence of governorship elections. Consequently, gubernatorial election cycles in Nigeria are not merely temporal phenomena but are characterized by significant political realignments that reshape the partisan composition of state governments.

II. Theoretical Review

The baseline theories are Persuasion Theory (AIDA Model) and Adeyemi's Electoral Agora Macro-Marketing review. These theories provide robust explanatory power for understanding how political communication strategies shape voter behaviour,

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engagement patterns, and electoral outcomes in Nigeria's evolving democratic landscape.

Persuasion Theory AIDA Model

The AIDA Model entails Attention, Interest, Desire, a model for understanding consumer decision-making processes. The AIDA Model posits that effective political communication must sequentially capture voter Attention, generate Interest in the candidate or party platform, cultivate Desire for the proposed policies or leadership, and ultimately drive Action, that is, the act of voting. Koech et al. (2025) demonstrated that an IMC combines social media, traditional media, rallies, and personal endorsements is key to successful political mobilization and voter engagement. The AIDA applicability to hybrid political marketing environment where traditional and digital communication channels converge.

Persuasion Theory is directly relevant to understanding how hybrid political marketing influences voter engagement and electoral efficacy in Nigeria's gubernatorial elections. The theory explains why the 2023 elections witnessed extensive digital campaigning by candidates such as Peter Obi, whose supporters placed the highest number of Facebook and Instagram ads (Dataphyte, 2022), yet voter turnout remained low nationally at 26.72% (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2026). The AIDA framework suggests that while digital platforms effectively captured Attention and generated Interest among urban youth, they failed to sufficiently cultivate Desire and Action, particularly in rural areas constrained by the digital divide. The theory thus informs the study's examination of how hybrid political marketing strategies can be optimised to guide voters through the entire persuasion sequence.

Electoral Agora Macro-Marketing Theory

Adebanji Adedeji Adeyemi (2026) opined that elections as marketplaces where political actors (suppliers) compete for voter support (demand) through strategic communication, policy offerings, and brand positioning. This theory challenges conventional approaches that attribute voter apathy to individual voter characteristics, instead emphasizing structural and systemic factors shaping voter engagement and electoral efficacy. The Electoral Agora Framework is particularly salient for examining hybrid political marketing and voter engagement in Nigeria's gubernatorial elections.

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The theory explains why repeated experiences of disputed results, judicial reversals, vote-buying, and logistical failures have weakened trust in the electoral process (Chiamogu & Chiamogu, 2026). Adeyemi's framework suggests that hybrid political marketing strategies can bridge the engagement-participation gap when they prioritise credibility, transparency, and authentic engagement over manipulative messaging. The theory informs the study's examination of how political actors can design communication strategies that address systemic information disorder, rebuild institutional trust, and ultimately enhance electoral efficacy.

Persuasion Theory and the Electoral Agora Framework are complementary rather than competing. The AIDA Model explains the micro-level cognitive processes through which individual voters are persuaded to engage and participate, while Adeyemi's Macro-Marketing Theory addresses the macro-level systemic factors that shape the electoral marketplace. Together, they provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding how hybrid political marketing influences voter engagement and electoral efficacy in Nigeria.

Empirical Review

Bello (2026) examined the role of storytelling in political marketing during the 2019 general elections in Kwara State, which ended the long-standing political dominance of the Saraki family. Adopting a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, the study collected data from 319 registered voters through a structured questionnaire measuring clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, and reliability/credibility alongside demographic support, margin of victory, and voter turnout. Using PLS-SEM analysis, the results demonstrated that clarity of campaign messages significantly influenced demographic support, margin of victory, and voter turnout. Emotional connections significantly influenced voter turnout and margin of victory but had no significant effect on demographic support. Reliability and credibility significantly influenced voter turnout and demographic support but had no significant effect on margin of victory.

Ikenga (2024) investigated the pathology of voters' apathy in the 2019 governorship elections in Nigeria, adopting elite theory as a framework to examine the Nigerian state as controlled by a minority elite rather than the majority populace. Utilising content

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analysis of journals, books, newspaper articles, and secondary sources, the study established that voter apathy has been persistent in Nigerian governorship elections and recorded its highest percentage in the 2019 governorship elections due to high levels of corruption and political bigotry existing in the electoral process.

Ikechi, Udo-Orji, Odimara, and Ujunwa (2026) examined the application of demarketing within the political context, focusing on its effects on electoral integrity, voter trust, and political accountability, as well as the mediating role of voter political awareness. Adopting a quantitative survey research design with data collected through structured questionnaires yielding 262 valid responses from Nigerian voters, the study employed PLS-SEM analysis. The findings revealed that demarketing politically imposed candidates significantly enhances voter trust and political accountability but does not exert a significant direct effect on electoral integrity. Voter political awareness significantly mediates the relationship between demarketing and democratic outcomes.

Ajo (2025) conducted a study to ascertain the role of billboard advertising in mobilising electorates during the 2023 general elections in Delta State. Adopting a survey research method with a sample of 400 voters from a population of 3,221,697, the study achieved a 97% response rate. The findings revealed massive use of billboard advertising during the 2023 general elections, with voters exposed to various political appeals, such as youth appeal being the most prominent. Crucially, the study found that exposure to billboard advertising did not influence voters' choice of candidates during the elections, concluding that billboards are important aspects of political advertising but are not as powerful as assumed, especially regarding influence on voter behaviour.

Clientelist politics in Nigeria (ScienceDirect, 2025) investigated the relationship between clientelism, partisanship, and core voter bases. Based on survey data from 1,539 respondents and semi-structured interviews, the research found that campaign spending is poorly regulated in Nigeria, with INEC lacking the capacity to effectively monitor campaign financing. The study revealed that clientelist practices have been common in Nigeria since the transition to democracy in 1999, and their prevalence is among the highest on the continent. The analysis indicated that while ethnicity was historically central to electoral choices, its weight has decreased in gubernatorial elections (less than 3% of respondents cited ethnicity as a motive). The declining

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electoral weight of ethnicity and the perverting of electoral politics have consecrated the dominance of clientelism and other malpractices. The study does not address how social media campaigning interacts with traditional clientelist mobilisation in gubernatorial elections. Furthermore, the data predates the 2023 election cycle, limiting its applicability to contemporary hybrid marketing dynamics.

The off-cycle gubernatorial elections conducted in eight states offer a unique comparative context that has not been systematically examined. Fourth, the interaction between hybrid marketing strategies and clientelist practices demands empirical attention. The influence of hybrid marketing on electoral efficacy across geopolitical zones, accounting for regional variations in digital access and political culture, remains insufficiently researched. This study addresses these gaps by examining the influence of hybrid political marketing on voter engagement and electoral efficacy in Nigeria's gubernatorial elections.

III. Methodology

This study adopts a comparative case study design to examine hybrid political marketing, voter engagement, and electoral efficacy across Edo, Ondo, and Osun States, selected for their off-cycle election status and distinct political dynamics (Abdulyakeen & Aliero, 2024). A mixed-methods approach integrates quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to capture the multidimensional nature of electoral behaviour. Quantitative data are collected through structured questionnaires administered to 1,200 registered voters (400 per state) using multi-stage cluster sampling to ensure representation across urban-rural divides and demographic categories (Odiboh, 2026). Qualitative data are gathered through semi-structured interviews with political candidates, campaign managers, and electoral officials, supplemented by critical discourse analysis of campaign materials and media coverage (Ojo & Fajimbola, 2025). Analytical techniques include descriptive and inferential statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data, with triangulation enhancing validity (Roelofs, 2024). Ethical protocols ensure informed consent and confidentiality. This enables systematic comparison of how hybrid marketing strategies shape voter engagement across distinct electoral cycles.

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IV. Discussion of Results

This session examines descriptive statistics of voter engagement and hybrid political marketing across Edo, Ondo, and Osun States, with 400 respondents per state. A total of 1,200 registered voters were surveyed across Edo, Ondo, and Osun States, with 400 respondents per state.

Multi-stage cluster sampling was employed, involving the random selection of local government areas, followed by political wards, to ensure representative coverage across urban-rural divides and demographic categories (Abdulyakeen & Aliero, 2024). This sampling technique enabled systematic comparison of how hybrid political marketing strategies shape voter engagement and electoral efficacy across distinct electoral cycles.

Table 1: Sampling Framework for Edo, Ondo, and Osun States

Sampling Stage	Edo State	Ondo State	Osun State
Geopolitical Zone	South-South	South-West	South-West
Total Registered Voters	2,501,081	2,053,061	2,300,000
Sample Size	400	400	400
Local Government Areas LGAs Selected	3	3	3
Urban LGAs	Egor, Oredo	Owo, Akure South	Ede, Osogbo
Rural LGAs	Esan, Orhio,	Ose, Akoko	Iwo, Irepodun
Wards per LGA	3	3	3
Questionnaires per Ward	44	44	44
Response Rate	97.5%	96.8%	98.0%

Sources: INEC, 2026

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Table 2: Voter Exposure to Political Marketing Strategies

Marketing Strategy	Edo n=400	Ondo n=400	Osun n=400	Total N=1200
Traditional Media	320 (80%)	308 (77%)	312 (78%)	940 (78.3%)
Radio Jingles	344 (86%)	332 (83%)	336 (84%)	1,012 (84.3%)
Posters/Billboards	356 (89%)	348 (87%)	352(88%)	1,056 (88.0%)
Door-to-Door Talks	288 (72%)	276 (69%)	292 (&#%)	856 (71.3%)
Digital Media				
Facebook/Instagram Ads	196 (49%)	188 (47%)	192 (48%)	576 (48.0%)
WhatsApp Campaigns	280 (70%)	272(83%)	284 (71%)	836 (69,7%)
Twitter/X Engagement	144 36%)	136(34%)	148 (37%)	428 (35.7%)
You Tube Videos	120 (30%)	116(29%)	124 (31%)	360 (30.0%)

Sources: field survey, 2026

Table 3 Voter Engagement Indicators

Engagement Indicator	Edo (n=400)	Ondo (n=400	Osun (n=400)	Total 1200
Politics with Family/Friends	280	268	284	832
Attended Political Rally	192	184	196	572
Followed Campaign News	248	240	252	740
Shared Political Content Online	120 (	112	124	356

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Contacted by Party Agent	256	248	260	764
Voted in Last Election	248	252	244	744

Table 4: Perceptions of Electoral Integrity

Perception Indicator	Edo (n=400)	Ondo (n=400)	Osun (n=400)	Total (N=1200)
Believe Votes Count	112(28%)	108(27%)	116(29%)	336(28.0%)
Trust INEC	96 (24%)	92(23%)	100(25%)	288(24.0)
Witnessed Vote-Buying	224 (56%)	216(54%)	288(57%)	668(55.7%)
Perceive Election Fair	88 (22%)	84(22%)	84(21%)	264(22.0%)
Plan to Vote in next Electuon	256(64)	252(63%)	260(65%)	768(64.4%)

Discussion of Results Based on Specific Objectives

Objective 1: To examine the influence of hybrid political marketing on voter engagement in Nigeria's gubernatorial elections.

The findings reveal that hybrid political marketing significantly influences voter engagement across the three states. Traditional media channels remain dominant, with posters/billboards (88%), radio jingles (84.3%), and rallies (78.3%) reaching the majority of voters. These figures align with Odiboh's (2026) observation that the 2019 elections predominantly relied on traditional methods, which reinforced party loyalty, personality politics, and ethno-regional affiliations. However, the data also reveal a notable shift toward digital strategies, particularly WhatsApp campaigns (69.7%) and Facebook/Instagram ads (48%). This finding supports Koech, Akinyemi-Oke, Okoye, and Molnár's (2025) assertion that integrated communication approaches combining social media, traditional media, rallies, and personal endorsements are key to successful political mobiliztion and voter engagement.

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The differential effectiveness of marketing strategies across states is noteworthy. Edo recorded the highest exposure to traditional media (rallies: 80%, radio: 86%, billboards: 89%), while Osun recorded the highest digital engagement (WhatsApp: 71%, Twitter/X: 37%). This variation reflects the distinct political cultures and media consumption patterns across Nigeria's geopolitical zones, as identified by Roelofs (2024). SME (particularly WhatsApp) is more effective in Osun, a state with higher internet penetration and youth population, underscores the need for contextually adapted political marketing strategies. The overall pattern suggests that while traditional media are essential for mass reach, digital platforms are increasingly critical for engaging urban youth and the politically active demographic.

Objective 2: To assess the effect of voter engagement on electoral participation in Nigeria's gubernatorial elections.

The data reveal a significant relationship between voter engagement and electoral participation. Respondents who discussed politics with family/friends (69.3%), attended rallies (47.7%), followed campaign news (61.7%), and were contacted by party agents (63.7%) exhibited higher likelihood of voting. Despite these engagement indicators, voter turnout remained low: Edo recorded 25.2% in 2020 and 22.08% in 2024; Ondo declined from 32% in 2020 to 24.8% in 2024; while Osun increased marginally from 42.2% accreditation in 2022 to 43.2% in 2026. This disparity of engagement and confirms Adeyemi's (2026) Engagement-Participation Gap Theory, which posits that the gap is not a failure of individual campaigns but an emergent property of the electoral marketing system itself.

The persistent gap between engagement and participation is particularly evident in the 56% of Edo respondents, 54% in Ondo, and 57% in Osun who witnessed vote-buying. This suggests that while voters are engaged, their participation is often transactional rather than intrinsically motivated. Etim's (2025) observation that poverty compels voters to accept inducements is consistent with these findings, as respondents in economically disadvantaged areas were more likely to report witnessing or accepting financial incentives. The study further reveals that trust in electoral institutions is critically low, with only 28% of respondents believing their votes count and only 24%

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trusting INEC, confirming the electoral efficacy crisis identified by Chiamogu and Chiamogu (2026).

Objective 3: To determine the influence of hybrid political marketing on electoral efficacy in Nigeria's gubernatorial elections.

The findings indicate that hybrid political marketing strategies influence perceptions of electoral efficacy, though the relationship is mediated by trust in electoral institutions. The overall low trust in INEC (24%) and perception that votes count (28%) reflect the erosion of electoral efficacy documented by Chiamogu and Chiamogu (2026), who found that voter turnout declined from 52.26% in 1999 to 26.72% in 2023. This decline suggests that despite increased hybrid marketing, voters do not perceive a meaningful connection between participation engagement and governance outcomes.

However, the Ekiti 2026 election provides a counterexample: Governor Oyebanji's re-election demonstrated that data-driven campaign models can significantly enhance voter outreach and engagement (Ojelu, 2026). This suggests that hybrid marketing strategies, when integrated with transparency and institutional credibility, can enhance electoral efficacy. The finding that 64% of respondents plan to vote in the next election, despite low trust, suggests a reservoir of latent electoral efficacy that can be activated through credible institutional reforms and transparent campaigning.

Objective 4: To ascertain the mediating role of voter engagement in the relationship between hybrid political marketing and electoral efficacy.

The data reveal that voter engagement partially mediates the relationship between hybrid political marketing and electoral efficacy. Respondents exposed to integrated marketing strategies (combining traditional and digital platforms) demonstrated higher engagement levels and, consequently, stronger perceptions of electoral efficacy. However, the mediation is weakened by negative experiences such as witnessed vote-buying (55.7%) and perceived electoral irregularities in Nigeria.

The off-cycle elections in Edo, Ondo, and Osun illustrate the mediating role of engagement. In Edo, despite high exposure to traditional media (86% radio, 89%

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billboards), voter engagement (62% followed campaign news) and participation (22.08%) were the lowest among the three states. The pervasive vote-buying (56% witnessed) and lack of trust in INEC (24%) in Edo likely undermined the mediating effect of engagement. In contrast, Osun, which had the highest WhatsApp engagement (71%) and the highest accreditation rates (43.2%), suggests that engagement through trusted digital platforms may strengthen the mediation pathway, particularly among youth and urban populations. This pattern confirms Akinyemi-Oke's (2024) finding that interpersonal communication which includes WhatsApp significantly outperforms impersonal strategies in persuading voters.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Political parties should tailor communication strategies to each state's political culture and media consumption patterns, leveraging traditional media for mass reach and digital platforms for urban youth engagement.
- INEC should enforce anti-vote-buying legislation and ensure transparency in campaign financing to restore voter confidence and enhance electoral efficacy.
- INEC should invest in reliable BVAS infrastructure and training to address operational challenges highlighted in the data.
- Civic education programmes should address institutional distrust and demonstrate the meaningful connection between participation and governance outcomes.
- The National Assembly should regulate the conduct of serving governors during off-cycle elections to prevent undue influence and voter intimidation.

Managerial/Policy Implications

Investment in data-driven strategies and community-based opinion leaders is essential, particularly in low-trust environments where interpersonal validation translates mass-mediated messages into behavioural action (Akinyemi-Oke, 2024). The differential effectiveness of communication channels across states underscores the need for market segmentation and tailored messaging.

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Strengthened capacity to monitor campaign financing, enforce election laws, and address technology challenges is critical to rebuilding public trust. The electoral body must address the gap between voter engagement and participation.

Comprehensive electoral reforms addressing systemic factors undermining participation including institutional distrust and economic pressures driving vote-buying are imperative.

IV. Conclusion

This study examined hybrid political marketing, voter engagement, and electoral efficacy across gubernatorial election cycles in Edo, Ondo, and Osun States. The findings reveal that hybrid political marketing significantly influences voter engagement, yet the engagement-participation gap persists due to low trust in electoral institutions, pervasive vote-buying, and weak institutional credibility. The differential effectiveness of communication strategies across states underscores the need for contextually adapted approaches. Electoral efficacy is critically low, with only 24% of respondents trusting INEC. As election 2027 is close in Nigeria, institutional reforms and context-sensitive political marketing strategies are essential for deepening democratic consolidation and enhancing citizen participation.

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