

Intervening Influence of Monetary and Material Inducements on the Relationship between Opinion Leaders and Voting Decisions of Urban and Rural Electorates in 2019 Gubernatorial Election in South-West, Nigeria

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Abstract. Opinions leaders are important political players who bridge the gap between the political elite and general public. They are generally regarded as people whose discussions make innovations attractive to the people with whom they speak and are, therefore, strategic in determining or dictating the voting decisions of the electorate. Past studies revealed that opinion leaders are influential at swaying voting decisions as a result of their personality strength or characteristics. However, significant efforts have not been made by existing studies to identify the most influential opinion leadership characteristic that determine voting decisions of urban and rural electorates in South-west, Nigeria. Such studies have also not established the intervening influence of monetary and material inducements on the relationship between opinion leaders and the voting decisions of urban and rural electorates. The study adopted triangulation research design. The population of the study comprised all 11,897,401 registered voters in the three sampled states in South-west, Nigeria. A sample size of 1,067 was obtained. The multistage sampling technique was used for the study. The study showed that reputation (urban $x=3.89$, rural $x=3.66$), social status (urban $x=3.64$, rural $x=3.58$) and educational attainment (urban $x=3.68$, rural $x=3.72$) were the most influential characteristics of opinion leaders, while their credibility rating was low (urban $x=3.48$, rural $x=3.44$). The study discovered that monetary inducement ($t=0.158$, $p>0.05$) did not significantly moderate the relationship between opinion leaders and the voting decision of urban and rural electorates, while material inducement ($x=3.61$) significantly moderated the relationship between opinion leaders and voting decisions of urban electorates. The study concluded that the intervening influence of

monetary inducement was not as significant as generally perceived, while material inducement surprisingly moderated the voting decisions of urban electorates. The study recommended that urban electorates should be wary of opinion leaders who act as intermediary between electorates and politicians to provide material items during electioneering.

Keywords: Opinion leadership, Opinion leadership characteristics, Monetary and material inducements, Urban and rural electorates.

1. Introduction

Opinion leaders are important political players who bridge the gap between politicians and the electorate. Burt (1999) expounded that opinion leaders are people whose discussion make innovations attractive to the people with whom they speak and are, therefore, strategic in determining or dictating the voting decision of the electorates. Raughupathi. Arazy and Shapra (2006) defined opinion leaders as those who exert unequal amount of influence on the decisions of others. Highlighting the strategic position of opinion leaders in the electoral process, Dubois (2015) noted that opinion leaders are important political players who bridge the gap between the political elite and the general public. It is noteworthy that opinion leaders are strategic in determining or dictating the voting decision of the electorate.

Tustin Vuuren, and Joubert (2007) argued that opinion leaders are characteristically communicative, have a strong personality and many social contacts that make it easy for them to relay information from one segment of the society to another. Some

distinguishing characteristics of opinion leaders have been acknowledged globally as being instrumental to their ability to influence voting decisions. Marko (2011) noted that they exert influence on their followers based on their standing within ethnic-political divides. This means that their position as ethnic figures could determine their influence. Chen, Glass and McCartney (2016) also attributed a leader's influence to such characteristics as reputation, stubbornness, appeal and extremeness. They explained that leaders with higher reputation will be able to persuade their neighbours thereby, attracting more followers. Hameed and Sawicka (2017) also emphasized the importance of knowledge and expertise to the influence of opinion leaders arguing that by virtue of their knowledge of the way of life of the people, leaders could convince their followers easily. Trepte and Scherer (2010) also emphasized the importance of knowledge to the influence of opinion leaders as they claimed that those who display high knowledge are respected when they offer advice.

However, in Africa, Bratton and Vande (2003) noted that patronage or 'clientelism' can also be an important determining factor of voting decisions as politicians through their intermediaries (which in most cases are opinion leaders) tend to, in a clientelistic relationship, use their power to provide economic privileges or other material favours to voters in return for their political support at the polls. Stokes (2007) opined that a form of clientelism often referred to as 'vote – buying' has been found prevalent in Africa and it emphasizes the handing out of money and gifts to win voters during electoral campaigns.

Harding (2010) opined that monetary inducement largely determines voting decisions across Africa. The author further explained that incumbent parties across Africa engage in widespread voter bribery in rural areas. Incumbency gives governing parties a significant comparative advantage in the distribution of minor consumption goods during election campaigns. The electoral impact of such distribution is assumed to be greater in rural areas where voters can be bought more cheaply and more reliably.

Patel, Sadie, Graham, Delany, and Baldry (2014) noted that in South African public conversations, the distribution of social grants by government has been likened to vote-buying and the distribution of food parcels prior to elections may, in some instances, take the form of 'undue influence'. Gottlieb (2014) noted that "Clientelism, the contingent exchange of goods for votes, often

condemned as undemocratic, has been an instrument employed by local political intermediaries in Senegal to extract resources from political parties and redistributing them among needy supporters. Nossiter (2012) noted that former President of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade tried to curry favour with village chiefs and religious leaders by offering them vehicles and monetary incentives. Baldwin (2013) also noted that there is an exploitative patron – client relationship between voters in Zambia and the customary chiefs.

Adamu, Ocheni and Ibrahim (2016) attributed vote buying to the inability of politicians to fulfil electoral promises as contained in their manifestoes. Ovwas (2013) declared that vote buying is a clear indication that the political class have failed as they always make unfulfilled promises and can no longer be trusted by the electorate. Consequently, electorates too see elections as an opportunity to sell their votes to represent their own dividend of democracy. Schaffer and Schedler (2005) submitted that candidates 'buy' and citizens/the electorate 'sell' votes as apples and other consumables are sold and bought in the market. The act of vote-buying by this orientation is seen as a contract in which voters sell to the highest bidder.

One thing that has become very clear from the submissions of the various scholars cited is - the idea that opinion leaders as agents of political mobilization may not have been doing enough in the area of sensitization and mobilization of the electorate to achieve the desired level of political participation and acceptable voting behaviour. Instead, it appears that opinion leaders' instrument of influence has changed or perhaps, they have added a new instrument as the political class now engages opinion leaders in the distribution of monetary and material items to sway votes in the urban and rural areas.

In Nigeria, the story is not different as it is widely believed that monetary inducement plays a key role as an instrument of persuasion used by political intermediaries and opinion leaders. Rufai (2014) observed that monetary inducement, through party agents and community leaders, played a decisive role in the 2012 local government election in Sabon – Gari area of Kaduna State. The researcher attributed the influence of monetary inducement on voting decisions to high level of poverty occasioned by unemployment and the inability of government to cater for the needs of the people. Bashir (2015) corroborated Rufai's claim of the use of financial inducement by opinion leaders when he submitted

that primordial factors like financial inducement or outright vote buying characterized the 2015 presidential election in Kaduna State. Olayode (2015) said that elections in Nigeria are discredited with rigging, religious and ethnic sentiments, tribal affiliations, etc. Voters vote during elections based on their relationship with leaders of the same religious persuasion, ethnic divisions and other sentiments. All these factors combined have been affecting voter turnout in Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Political institutions engage opinion leaders to disseminate political campaign messages to potential voters. Opinion leaders, according to Steiner (2013), are considered influential, because of their expertise, visibility and credibility. In their effort to influence the voting decisions of their followers, it is believed that some opinion leaders also employ various tactics such as distribution of food items, souvenirs and other gift items. They have become part of the strategies employed by opinion leaders to influence the voting decisions of urban and rural voters. Politicians, especially those in power, through opinion leaders, take advantage of the level of poverty and unemployment to use personal and state resources to influence the electorate during an election. It is believed by some people that the “trader moni” distributed through market leaders during the 2019 elections was one of such efforts. The addition of monetary and material inducements, of course, has far reaching implications for Nigeria’s nascent democracy as leadership bought or purchased may not yield good dividends of democracy.

It was in line with the observations that the researcher sought to investigate the extent to which the characteristics and personality strength of opinion leaders remain dominant forces used in influencing voters in both urban and rural communities. The extent of influence of monetary and material items such as distribution of food, grading of roads, drilling of boreholes and a host of other strategies on the voting decisions of urban and rural electorates was also found worthy of investigation. Another major concern of this study was to know if opinion leaders might not be able to influence urban electorates with material items because of their level of education and exposure.

1.2 Research Questions

What is the most influential opinion leadership characteristic that determined voting decisions of

urban and rural electorates during the 2019 gubernatorial election in South-west, Nigeria?

What is the intervening influence of monetary inducement on the relationship between opinion leaders and voting decisions of urban and rural electorates during the 2019 gubernatorial election in South-west, Nigeria?

What is the intervening influence of material inducement on the relationship between opinion leaders and voting decisions of urban and rural electorates during the 2019 gubernatorial election in South-west, Nigeria?

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study focused on the 2019 gubernatorial election in South-west, Nigeria. All the three South-west States that conducted gubernatorial election in 2019 were enumerated. The states are: Lagos, Ogun and Oyo. This study evaluated the use of opinion leaders as a strategy employed by political parties and their influence on the voting decisions of urban and rural electorates in South-west states of Nigeria. The study was conducted between November, 2020 and January, 2021.

2. Conceptual Review

2.1 Voting Behavior / Voters Turnout in Nigeria

The term voting behaviour tries to seek explanation into the factors responsible for the actions and inactions of individuals during elections. Voting behaviour is derived from political behaviour. It is about the factors that affect an individual disposition to election. Voting behaviour talks about the reasons behind the voting behaviour of the electorate.

There are three key factors affecting voting behaviour in Nigeria. The factors are ethnicity, religion and poverty/economic factor. Ethnicity is viewed as a form of communality in which “a community of people have a conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues of origin, kinship, ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language” (Thompson, 2000:58).

In 1983, ethnicity was still a key factor. Uba, quoted in Onu and Momoh (2005:126), the East voted for NPN while the West was for UPN. The trend still continued in the Fourth Republic with ACN getting the West, PDP winning in the North and ANPP in the East. It is noteworthy to say that the issue of ethnicity is now gradually giving way to nationalism with the establishment of nationalist parties. We now have two dominant parties (PDP and APC) with national

outlook thereby reducing the influence of ethnicity on our voting behaviour. Religion has also been a strong factor as we often hear of Christian/Muslim or Muslim/Christian ticket. This practice is evident in the leadership of the nation as narrated by Ayantayo (2009):

Nnamdi Azikwe/TafawaBalewa (Christian/Muslim)	1960-1966
Shehu Shagari/Alex Ekwueme (Muslim/Christian)	1979-1983
Buhari/Idiagbon (Muslim/Muslim)	1983-1985
Babangida/EbituUkwe, Aikhomu (Muslim/Christian)	1985-1993
Shonekan/Abacha (Christian/Muslim)	1993-1994
Abacha/Diya (Muslim/Christian)	1994-1998
Abubakar/Akhigbe (Muslim/Christian)	1998-1999
Obasanjo/Atiku (Christian/Muslim)	1999-2007
Yar'Adua/Jonathan (Muslim/Christian)	2007-2010
Jonathan/Sambo (Christian/Muslim)	2010-2015

Source: Ayantayo, (2009:25).

Today, we have Buhari/Osinbajo (Muslim/Christian) since 2015. There has always been the fear of Islamization with a Muslim/Muslim ticket. It has also been said that popular religious leaders in Nigeria openly campaigned for candidates of their faith. The third factor is poverty/economic. In a research by Ekpu (2010), he found that more than 70% of the population is estimated to live below poverty line. The United Nations report of Nigeria's Human Poverty Index (HPI) places us among 25 poorest nations in the world. The poor state of most Nigerians, especially at the grassroots places them at the mercy of politicians as they accept anything from anybody who asks for their votes. In a study conducted by Iwundu (2011) some respondents said "we have no option, at least, we will be able to take care of that day's meal with the token given to us, conscience notwithstanding".

Poverty has now led to a new voting behaviour of vote buying in Nigeria. Adamu, Ocheni and Ibrahim (2016) stated that, today, the role of money in politics and vote-buying in Nigerian political system today has paved way for the political bourgeois in the country to dominate and occupy key elective and appointive political positions in the country. Vote buying has become a big strategy by many politicians in the world and Nigerian politicians have keyed into it. Adamu, et al (2016) explained that the simple logic behind the adoption of the method is because of the inability of the political class to convince the electorate through their manifesto as to what they stand for, their mission and vision and most importantly, what the electorate stand to benefit if voted into power. Schaffer and Schedler (2005) submitted that candidates 'buy' and citizen/electorate 'sell' votes as apples and other consumables are sold and bought in the market. The act of vote-buying by

this orientation is seen as a contract in which voters sell to the highest bidder.

The idea of vote buying has been inhibiting credible elections in contemporary Nigeria. This has become so pronounced especially now that the electoral laws have been reviewed. Votes are now beginning to count and Nigerian politicians are taking full advantage of it. You find accusations and counter accusations of vote-buying by opposing parties. The most unfortunate aspect of vote buying is that people with genuine interest to change the lots of the people are always denied the opportunity to participate and contest in elections because the act of vote buying starts even at the party primaries. This view was corroborated by Nwosu (1996) when he wrote that a candidate who lost out claimed that money was paid to party functionaries, who were demanding and negotiating.

Vote-buying has become entrenched in our electoral process as politicians now see vote buying as the easiest means of winning elections. This thinking is corroborated by Adamu et al (2016:93) when they wrote that money politics and vote-buying got to their peak in the elections that brought in the civilian administration in 1999 and civilian-civilian transition elections of 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015. The trend has continued as the present government in the build-up to the 2019 general elections was also officially involved in vote buying through the 'Trader Moni' scheme through which the federal government was giving ₦10,000 to petty traders. Transparency International also condemned the act as a method of vote-buying.

Vote buying is a clear indication that the political class has failed as they always make unfulfilled promises and can no longer be trusted by the electorate. The voters see politics as an avenue to trade their votes for financial gains (Ovwasa 2013). Vote buying has found its way into our political lexicon under different names. Stomach infrastructure entered into Nigeria's political lexicon after the June 2014 Ekiti gubernatorial election. Adamu, Ocheni and Ibrahim (2006) used the term to describe the electorates' interest in material inducements as opposed to long term gains.

There are factors determining voting decisions and they differ from country to country and even from locality to locality. Hazarika (2015) gave the following as factors determining voting decisions. The factors are: Charisma, caste, religion, language, money, sub-nationalism, performance of the party in power, mass literacy, factionalism, public esteem of

the candidate, election campaigns. etc. Iwundu (2011) opined that of all the identified factors, ethnicity, religion and poverty/economic are the basic determinants of voting decisions in Nigeria. Harder and Krosnick (2008) gave a formula for the factors determining the turnout of the American electorate: Likelihood of voting = (motivation to vote x Ability to vote). They went ahead to identify demographic factors such as education, income, occupation, age, gender and other social and psychological factors, mobility, residency, race, neighbourhood characteristics, marriage, closeness of the race, negative advertising, canvassing, pre-election polls and predictions of election outcomes on election day as key factors determining turnout in a typical American election.

The centre for social development in Africa in a study conducted on the 2014 voting behaviour of the South African electorate concluded that race, party identification, beliefs about the protection of rights, ratings of government's performance, perception of corruption, age, trust in institutions, clientelism related reasons, vote-buying (though not very significant), party loyalty were found to be predictors of voting decisions of the South African voters. Snyder (2011) opined that scholarly works on voting and political behaviour are many and their findings varied but came up with similar trends. As far as literature is concerned, the usefulness of age, education, and political knowledge are always shown as key determinants.

3. Characteristics of Urban/Rural Electorates

In an attempt to establish the urban-rural cleavage, Cutler and Jenkins (2000) contended that the strongest differences between them lie within the questions of moral traditionalism: urban voters tend to be more socially progressive, whereas rural areas maintain a more traditional character. Shedding more light on why rural areas maintain a more traditional character.

Iwuoha (2018), submitted that most rural voters were disenfranchised because of the long distance between their homes and the polling booths. This limitation was also confirmed by The Canvass (2014), an American Election Journal, which asserted that the distance between some rural jurisdictions and their voting peers coupled with the inability to get required identification for the purpose of voting prevented them from voting.

Harding, (2010) explained that rural voters are largely elderly, not so educated people with more female than male. These factors coupled with the group interest pattern of voting of the rural dwellers render them less independent when it comes to voting decisions than the urban dwellers. Loyalty to identity groups by rural voters was also echoed by Ahmed (2008) who claimed that voters in rural areas of Pakistan vote for survival as a group rather than loyalty to a particular candidate or party.

Karnes (2006) argued that religious inclinations are reputed to be important factors in explaining rural-urban voting cleavages. Sharing their thought on the influence of religion on the voting decisions of American rural voters, Dillion and Savage (2006) opined that the concentration of evangelical churches in rural areas has been linked to respect for conservative beliefs.

Litcher and Brown (2011) also argued on the factors that determine the voting decisions of rural voters. Unlike their urban counterparts, rural people are more likely to work in mining, agriculture and other extractive sectors of the economy. Kelly and Lobao (2018) argued that the income and educational qualification of rural voters are lower and poverty rates higher in rural areas than urban. Because of this level of poverty, Harding (2010) opined that ruling parties across the African continent engage in monumental vote buying in rural areas. Incumbency gives ruling parties a significant advantage in the distribution of consumption goods during electioneering. The electoral gains recorded from such distribution, which Conroy-Krutz terms "petty patronage" is believed to be greater in rural areas, where voters can be easily and reliably brought.

Since poverty has been identified as one of the characteristics of rural voters, it may not be out of place to say that rural voters vote more than the urban voters. Characteristic of the relationship between political participation and economic well-being, Joshi, Pradhan and Sidhwani (2016) observed that the poor in India are more enthusiastic about voting than the rich. They went ahead to state that the rich in poor settlements vote more than the rich in rich settlements and relatedly, the poor in rich settlements. By implication, it means the poorer a people are, the more the turnout in such an area.

Weiner and Field (1976) stated that even though there is no formal classification of constituencies as urban or rural in India, the turnout in urban areas is less than in rural areas. Falcao (2016) argued that it is a known fact that the urban electorate in India vote less than the rural electorate.

4. Theoretical framework

The concept of a two-step flow of communication started with Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944) in their study on the American election campaigns in the 1940s reported in the *People's Choice*. They conducted the study hoping to discover that media campaigns dictated the voting choice of Americans. Surprisingly, the group discovered that the media exerted very little influence on voter's choice. They also found that most people already made up their minds even before the voting took place. Majority of those who changed their voting decisions during the campaigns attributed such changes to other people, not the media. The revelations, therefore, ensured the emergence of a new idea of media influence unlike the days of the magic bullet that assumed media consumers as passive. The research by Lazarsfeld et al brought about a new concept of media effect, the two step flow of communication unlike the single step flow.

Communication flows are not as easy and direct as described in the two-step flow. Communication not only flows from the mass media to opinion leaders and from opinion leaders to people, communication also flows from the people to opinion leaders as well as between influencers themselves. This is to say that opinion leaders are also influenced by their fellows. The theory has been criticized for not giving a detailed explanation of how opinion leaders differ from ordinary citizens.

Liu (2007) opined that the theory also did not take cognizance of some major news stories disseminated directly by the news media. It is also wrong to think that only opinion leaders get information directly from the media. The theory did not pay much attention to the reputation and credibility of opinion leaders as information coming from a trusted medium may be difficult to dispel by an incredible opinion leader. The theory also fails to take cognizance of the role of individual differences when it comes to information processing and media use.

The theory has also failed to critically examine the methods of persuasion being used by those regarded as opinion leaders. Some of the opinion leaders have become agents of political parties in Nigeria and are being used to financially induce voters (Adamu, Ocheni, and Ibrahim, (2016). The weaknesses of the theory notwithstanding, the theory is very relevant to this study, especially in Nigeria where the population is predominantly illiterate and rural. Therefore, people do not have access to the vehicles of the mass media. Secondly, because of the sociological bond of the African people where people act based on the

influence of the social group to which they belong, the influence of opinion leaders is still largely pronounced.

4.1 Knowledge Gap Theory

The theory was developed by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) as a result of the observed imbalance in the flow of information within the American society. The theory posits that society does not evenly acquire information as it varies with the social and economic status of the people. Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) argued that as the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socio-economic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than the lower status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between these segments tends to increase rather than decrease. The theory, in essence, talks about the gap between the higher and the lower educated people. The theory posits increasing differences in knowledge due to social structure – based inequality.

The theory did not say that people with lower socio-economic status will not gain information, but the emphasis is that the higher socio-economic class would gain more knowledge faster. Overtime, the relationship between education and knowledge was predicted to increase at a greater rate for topics that received high media attention. Knowledge is defined as information gained and remembered through a learning process, whereas information gaps are disparities in data available to be learned. Corroborating the position of Tichenor et al, Gaziano (2016) argued that as more and more information is disseminated into a social system, a community or a nation, the “haves” gain more knowledge faster than the “have nots” so that relative differentials in knowledge between them increase, both at one point in time and overtime.

The knowledge gap theory is relevant to this study because it captures the educational, infrastructural and informational gap between the rural and urban voters occasioned by the differences in the socio-economic status of the people. It explains why the urban voters are more likely to make independent electoral decisions as a result of their ability to easily acquire information than their rural counterparts who do not have the requisite ingredients. As predicted by the theory, there will always be information gap between the rural and urban voters because of the disparities in data available to be learned. Urban voters are exposed to a lot of informational data, whereas the rural voters are not.

4.2 Rational Choice Theory

The rational choice theory is relevant to this study because it is an economic theory of democracy that gives an economic explanation of voting behaviour. It was propounded by Downs in 1957 in his work called, "An Economic Theory of Democracy". The basic assumptions are: That individuals use rational calculations to make rational choices that result in outcomes aligned with their own best interests, that individuals are rational actors who use rational information to try to actively maximize their advantage in any situation and therefore consistently trying to minimize their losses, that all considerations pertinent to choice (that may include attitude towards risk, resentment, envy, loyalty, and love) can be incorporated into agent's preference rankings over all possible end states. In rational choices, agents are described by their unchanging sets of preferences over all conceivable global outcomes and for choices in which probability of outcomes are either risky or uncertain, rational agents exhibit consistencies among their choices much as one would expect from an astute gambler.

According to rational choice theory, political parties seek to win elections, not with bad intentions but to gain honour and respect attached to being in power. The prestige and profits that political parties pursue is determined by electoral victories. Downs (1957) explained that rationality is derived from the fact that voters, political parties and government have a lot of options to choose from, starting from most to least favourable.

Rationality of the voters is measured in terms of their instinctive capacity to weigh the expected benefits of all alternatives available to them. For instance, if the expected benefit of the party in power carries more weight than that of the opposition, they will likely vote for the government in power and if that of opposition outweighs that of government, they will go for the opposition. If the expected benefit is zero, they will abstain from voting. Therefore, this theory rationally explains the voting behaviour of voters. Downs explains further that what rational theory considers as what matters to voters is not ideology, but concrete actions that government takes. "The theory sees an average voter as a strategist who evaluates the chances of his preferred party winning the election.

The idea of expected benefit as proposed by the theory can be assumed to be relevant to the Nigerian situation to a large extent as majority of voters vote

based on the expected benefits from the government that gets to power. Also, the strategic rational voting stance of the theory can also be used to explain the voting behaviour of Nigerian voters as a number of voters interacted with in Ogun State claimed that they strategically voted for APC because they did not want the election to go the way of a political party they considered undesirable. The theory is therefore very useful in explaining certain voting behaviours.

5. Empirical Review

5.1 Opinion Leadership and Influence

Leoper, Steiner and Stewart's (2013) examined the relationship between expertise and the extent of influence of opinion leaders in their work, "Influential opinion leaders". They argued that experts' influence depended on their biases. Leoper et al distinguished between the degrees of bias: moderately biased and partisan expert. The study discovered that good leaders could be very influential and their influence depended primarily on their expertise and visibility. They also found that what matters is not their degree of expertise, but their relative expertise compared to the followers. In a similar study on the role of expertise and knowledge on opinion leadership influence, Kwon and Song (2015) investigated the role of opinion leaders, known as market mavens in marketing parlance, in their work, "The role of opinion leaders in influencing consumer behaviour with a focus on the market mavens: A meta-analysis". The study confirmed that despite direct information from the mass media, consumers still make their purchase decisions based on the opinion of those they consider as experts who are very knowledgeable about the products they want to buy. Hameed and Sawicka (2017) also emphasized the importance of knowledge and expertise to the influence of the opinion leader in their work, "The importance of opinion leaders in agricultural extension". They argued that leaders, by virtue of their knowledge of the way of life of the people, could convey messages of development convincingly in the people's language.

They concluded that opinion leaders, by virtue of their expertise and knowledge of the local community, multiply the efforts of the change agents by carrying the message to more possible adopters, which will translate into effectiveness by achieving more diffusion in less time. Writing on expertise and knowledge as tools of influence by opinion leaders, Scherer and Trepte (2010) went further than Hameed and Sawicka (2017) to investigate the knowledge of opinion leaders in their area of interest as they argued

that this aspect had been taken for granted by communication scholars. The study found that the 'informed opinion leaders' displayed both high knowledge and high opinion leadership; the 'uninformed opinion leaders' have average knowledge but high rating on opinion leadership scale. Trepte and Scherer also discovered the 'silent experts', who rate high on knowledge but low on opinion leadership and finally 'other persons', that possess little knowledge and do not perceive themselves as political opinion leaders.

Chen, Glass & McCartney (2016) found out other characteristics that will determine the influence of opinion leaders in their study, "Characteristics of successful opinion leaders in a bounded confidence model". Chen et al attributed a leader's influence to such characteristics as reputation, stubbornness, appeal and extremeness.

In their model, they claimed reputation differs among leaders, stubbornness of a leader is reflected by his confidence towards normal agents, appeal is represented by the confidence of followers towards them and extremes is measured in terms of the opinion values of leaders.

5.2 Factors Influencing Voting Behaviour/Decisions of Voters

Nkwede (2019) examined the factors that influence voter behaviour with special emphasis on individual's psychological processes as a key factor in voting behaviour in his work, "Political parties, citizen participation and voter behaviour in Africa: A study of Nigeria".

Nkwede's study, found that party affiliation and material inducement were the most prominent factors dictating voter behaviour. The study also revealed that religion/ethnicity is of less importance to voter behaviour during elections in Nigeria. This position was also echoed by Omar (2018) when he examined the factors influencing voter behaviour in Zimbabwe in the face of deteriorating living standards, sky rocketing inflation and unemployment in his dissertation, "Analysis of the factors that influence voting behaviour in Zimbabwe: The case of Zvishavane District". The study particularly discovered that vote buying was the most dominant of all the various mechanisms of electoral fraud and was mostly perpetrated in the rural areas of Zimbabwe. This study, no doubt, has mirrored most of the factors influencing voting behaviour, especially in Africa. Adamu, Ocheni and Ibrahim (2016) were concerned about the quality of voter turnout and its effect on the voting decisions on the

electorate in their work, "Money politics and analysis of voting behaviour in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects for free and fair elections". The study found that contemporary Nigerian society is characterized by money politics as a result of the inability of political parties and their candidates to conduct their political activities in an orderly manner.

Party manifesto and integrity of candidates contesting for political offices were no longer convincing.

6. Methodology

This study employed survey as the research design. Survey is the most engaged design in social and behavioural sciences for investigating the nature, the cause and effects of a phenomenon. Kothari and Garg (2014) defined survey as the method of securing information concerning a phenomenon under study from all or a selected number of respondents of the concerned universe. Survey enabled the researcher to generate quantitative data from the respondents, who are the electorate in South-west, Nigeria. Survey was found appropriate because of its relevance in providing accurate responses to sensitive issues. The survey approach was triangulated using questionnaire and interview guide as instruments of data collection to answer key questions raised in the study.

A total enumeration of the three states that conducted gubernatorial election in 2019 was done. The states are: Lagos, Ogun and Oyo. The number of registered voters for the 2019 general elections in the three states was 11,879,401 as supplied by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

The sample size for this study is one thousand and sixty seven (1067) participants.

The sampling process for this study involved the use of multistage sampling technique. It was used because for the sampling process, more than one sampling techniques were deemed appropriate and were used at different phases of the sampling process.

Questionnaire was used as it afforded the researcher the opportunity of sourcing information directly from primary sources. The questionnaire was constructed in such a manner that ensured clarity and completeness. The questionnaire contained close-ended items. The questionnaire was structured into six sections (A-F) with each section consisting of questions that provided answers to each of the formulated research questions. Section A, which addressed research question one consisted of items that were close-ended while all the items from sections B-F were close-ended using the Likert

format. Therefore, the responses were Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), Very Low Extent (VLE), and Not at All (NA). The format was used to ensure easy coding and expression of respondents' opinions. The questionnaire items were interpreted to Yoruba for some respondent who could not read and write in English Language.

The research instruments were subjected to experts' perusal and correction. The instruments were assessed by two experts in the field of Mass Communication (Political Communication), two Political scientists and one INEC official, and their opinions and corrections were taken into consideration.

The Cronbach's Alpha test was carried out with 60 copies of the instrument administered at Ifelodun Local Government, Osun State in the pilot test. The benchmark for reliability of Cronbach's Alpha score is 0.70 (Ezekiel et.al, 2010). All the constructs scored above the minimal 0.70. Therefore, the instrument was reliable.

The questionnaire as an instrument was administered by the researcher using the face-to-face approach as it helped the researcher to explain any confusing items in the questionnaire to the respondents (Okonkwo, 2018). The researcher also engaged trained research assistants to administer copies of the questionnaire.

Most of the research assistants were people who were familiar with the environment so that information can be freely given to them, especially in the rural areas. The face-to-face administration of research instruments enhanced a high level of returns.

The statistical data analysis adopted included descriptive analysis (simple percentages and frequency tables) and inferential analysis (Hayes process analysis, version 3.4; model 1 and multiple linear regression). The Statistical Products and Service Solutions (SPSS), version 25 was used for the analysis. The descriptive analysis was used to analyze the research questions as it helped to view the proportion of respondents sharing similar characteristics while also noting how dispersed the observation about the phenomenon under study was (Unyimadu, 2016, Dipeolu, 2015).

7. Data analysis

This section analyses the data collected in order to evaluate and compare the influence of opinion leaders on the voting decisions of urban and rural electorates in South West, Nigeria and how this influence translated to electoral gains for political parties. One thousand and sixty seven (1067) copies of the questionnaire were administered, while nine hundred and eighty four copies (984) were retrieved and found valid for analysis; resulting in 92.2 percent response rate.

Research Question One: What is the most influential opinion leadership characteristic that determined voting decisions of urban and rural electorates during the 2019 gubernatorial election in South-west, Nigeria?

Table 1: Link between Opinion Leadership Characteristics and Followership among Urban and Rural Voters

Variables	Urban		Rural		Average Mean/Indicator (Standard Deviation)	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	Urban	Rural
Perceived Reputation						
Opinion leaders in my area are well known; therefore, I follow their advice.	3.84	1.13	3.85	1.37	3.67 (1.14)	3.66 (1.33)
I follow the suggestions of the opinion leaders in my area because they can be emulated.	3.58	1.08	3.54	1.24		
I follow the advice of opinion leaders in my area because they help to project our community	3.60	1.21	3.58	1.39		
Social Status						
The opinion leaders in my community are highly placed individuals whose advice is sought after	3.82	1.12	3.82	1.24		
The social position of the opinion leaders in my area makes the opinion leaders speak authoritatively for my area	3.61	1.15	3.46	1.31	3.64 (1.16)	3.58 (1.30)
The social rating of opinion leaders in my community makes me to follow their advice	3.48	1.22	3.44	1.36		
Perceived Credibility						
I follow the direction of opinion leaders in my area because they are truthful	3.72	1.13	3.78	1.17	3.48 (1.16)	3.44 (1.29)
I listen to opinion leaders in my community because they are dependable	3.49	1.09	3.47	1.27		
I rely on information given by opinion leaders in my area because they are incorruptible.	3.23	1.28	3.07	1.42		

Educational Attainment						
I follow the direction offered by opinion leaders in my community because they are well-educated.	3.83	1.18	3.84	1.17		
I listen to opinion leaders in my community because their educational attainment shows in their good leadership and administrative skills.	3.60	1.13	3.54	1.18	3.68 (1.18)	3.72 (1.17)
I take advice from opinion leaders in my community because their educational attainment shows in their good communication skills	3.61	1.22	3.78	1.16		
Political Status						
I believe in whatever opinion leaders in my area tell me because the opinion leaders are important politically.	3.71	1.16	3.63	1.19		
The political position of opinion leaders in my community determines the people's political decision.	3.50	1.18	3.34	1.17	3.60 (1.19)	3.49 (1.23)
The political stance of opinion leaders in my community is usually being sought after for electoral decisions.	3.59	1.24	3.50	1.33		
Economic Status						
I follow the advice of opinion leaders in my community because they are rich.	3.32	1.30	3.07	1.52		
Monetary assistance from opinion leaders for community projects in my area makes people to take advice from opinion leaders in my area.	3.41	1.15	3.22	1.32	3.35 (1.25)	3.22 (1.38)
I follow the advice of opinion leaders in my community because they have known source of income that explains their wealth.	3.30	1.28	3.38	1.30		
Religious Status						
I always seek the views of religious leaders in my community before taking decisions.	3.61	1.29	3.16	1.46		
The religious position of opinion leaders in my area makes them to speak authoritatively to the people.	3.49	1.20	3.37	1.45	3.49 (1.24)	3.28 (1.46)
Most issues, including political and religious, are always tabled before opinion leaders in my community for their intervention.	3.37	1.25	3.32	1.48		
Average Overall Mean	3.56	1.19	3.48	1.31		

Source: Field Survey 2020

KEY: VHE=Very High Extent, HE=High Extent, LE=Low Extent, VLE=Very Low Extent, NA= Not at all***Decision Rule if mean is ≤ 1.49=Not at all; 1.5 to 2.49 = Very Low Extent; 2.5 to 3.49 =Low Extent; 3.5 to 4.49= High Extent; 4.5 to 5= Very High Extent

Table 1.0 shows that generally, the link between leadership characteristics of the opinion leaders and their followership was high in the urban areas (\bar{x} =3.56); while it was low among rural respondents (\bar{x} =3.48). This implies that among urban participants, characteristics of opinion leaders to a high extent were linked to their followership of opinion leaders. However, opinion leadership characteristics among rural participants were to a low extent connected to their followership of opinion leaders. Further analysis however showed that perceived reputation (Urban= \bar{x} =3.89; Rural= \bar{x} =3.66), social status (Urban= \bar{x} =3.64; Rural= \bar{x} =3.58) and educational attainment (Urban= \bar{x} =3.68; Rural= \bar{x} =3.72) were to a high extent linked to both urban and rural electorates' followership of opinion leaders. In addition, political status was to a high extent connected to urban electorates' followership of opinion leaders (\bar{x} =3.60); while it was to a low extent connected to rural electorates' followership of opinion leaders (\bar{x} =3.49). Furthermore, perceived credibility (Urban= \bar{x} =3.48; Rural= \bar{x} =3.44), economic status (Urban= \bar{x} =3.25; Rural= \bar{x} =3.22) and religious status (Urban= \bar{x} =3.49; Rural= \bar{x} =3.28) were both to a low extent linked to both urban and rural followership of opinion leaders.

This implies that generally, characteristics of opinion leaders determined the followership they enjoyed among urban electorates more than the rural electorates. Perceived reputation, social status and educational attainment were to a high extent linked to both urban and rural electorates' followership of opinion leaders. In addition, political status was to a high extent connected to urban electorates' followership of opinion leaders; while it was to a low extent connected to rural electorates' followership of opinion leaders. Finally, perceived credibility, economic status and religious status were both to a low extent linked to both urban and rural followership of opinion leaders.

Research Question Two: What is the intervening influence of Monetary Inducement on the relationship between opinion leaders and voting decisions of urban and rural electorates during the 2019 gubernatorial election in South-west, Nigeria?

Table 1.1: Connection between Monetary Inducement and Followership among Urban and Rural Voters

Items	Urban		Rural	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
I listen to opinion leaders in my community because of material gifts.	3.28	1.44	2.99	1.59
Distribution of gift items makes people listen to political directive from opinion leaders in my area.	3.44	1.25	3.49	1.29
People follow the electoral stance of opinion leaders in my community because they distribute money.	3.48	1.32	3.30	1.38
Opinion leaders in my community are used to distribute monetary gifts such as “trader moni” to the people.	3.23	1.33	3.21	1.51
Average Overall Mean	3.36	1.33	3.25	1.44

Source: Field Survey 2020

KEY: VHE=Very High Extent, HE=High Extent, LE=Low Extent, VLE=Very Low Extent, NA= Not at all***Decision Rule if mean is \leq 1.49=Not at all; 1.5 to 2.49 = Very Low Extent; 2.5 to 3.49 =Low Extent; 3.5 to 4.49= High Extent; 4.5 to 5= Very High Extent

Table 1.1 indicates a low level of connection between monetary inducement and followership of opinion leaders among urban (\bar{x} =3.36) and rural (\bar{x} =3.25) participants. Specifically, participants rated the following assertions to a low extent, that: they listened to opinion leaders in their community because of monetary gifts (Urban= \bar{x} =3.28; Rural= \bar{x} =2.99), distribution of gift items made people listen to political directive from opinion leaders (Urban= \bar{x} =3.44; Rural= \bar{x} =3.49), people followed the electoral stance of opinion leaders in their community because they distributed money (Urban= \bar{x} =3.48; Rural= \bar{x} =3.30) and that opinion leaders in their community distributed monetary gifts such as “trader moni” to the people (Urban= \bar{x} =3.23; Rural= \bar{x} =3.21).

Research Question Three: What is the intervening influence of material inducement on the relationship between opinion leaders and voting decisions of urban and rural electorates in the 2019 gubernatorial election in South-west, Nigeria?

Table 1.2: Link between Material Inducement and Followership among Urban and Rural Voters

Items	Urban		Rural	
	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD
The use of opinion leaders in my community to offer job opportunities makes people follow their directive.	3.75	1.27	3.48	1.36
The use of opinion leaders to nominate people for holy pilgrimage and scholarship opportunities makes people respect the views of such opinion leaders in my community.	3.54	1.20	3.32	1.42
Provision of essential community needs such as boreholes, grading of roads, etc makes people to respect the position of leaders in my community.	3.54	1.32	3.36	1.39
Average Overall Mean	3.61	1.27	3.39	1.39

Source: Field Survey 2020

KEY: VHE=Very High Extent, HE=High Extent, LE=Low Extent, VLE=Very Low Extent, NA= Not at all***Decision Rule if mean is \leq 1.49=Not at all; 1.5 to 2.49 = Very Low Extent; 2.5 to 3.49 =Low Extent; 3.5 to 4.49= High Extent; 4.5 to 5= Very High Extent

Table 1.2 shows that generally, the connection between material inducement and opinion leader followership among urban (\bar{x} =3.61) participants was high but was low among rural (\bar{x} =3.39) participants. The connection between material inducement and opinion leader followership among urban participants was high as follows: the use of opinion leaders in communities to offer job opportunities made people follow their directive (\bar{x} =3.75), the use of opinion leaders to nominate people for holy pilgrimage made people respect the views of such opinion leaders in communities (\bar{x} =3.54) and promise of scholarship opportunities by opinion leaders in communities made people to listen to such leaders (\bar{x} =3.54). On the other hand, the connection between material inducement and opinion leader followership among rural participants was low as follows: the use of

opinion leaders in communities to offer job opportunities made people follow their directive (\bar{x} =3.48), the use of opinion leaders to nominate people for holy pilgrimage made people respect the views of such opinion leaders in communities (\bar{x} =3.32) and promise of scholarship opportunities by opinion leaders in communities made people to listen to such leaders (\bar{x} =3.36). This implies that there is more connection between material inducement and opinion leader followership among urban participants than rural participants in terms of: the use of opinion leaders in communities to offer job opportunities made people follow their directive, the use of opinion leaders to nominate people for holy pilgrimage made people respect the views of such opinion leaders in communities, promise of scholarship opportunities by opinion leaders in communities made people to listen

to such leaders and provision of essential community needs such as boreholes, grading of roads, etc made people to respect the position of such leaders.

8. Discussion of Findings

The study sought to identify the most influential characteristics of opinion leaders that determined voting decisions of urban and rural electorates during 2019 gubernatorial election in South-west, Nigeria. It also sought to examine the intervening influence of monetary and material inducements on the relationship between opinion leaders and voting decisions of urban and rural electorates in South-west, Nigeria.

Research Question 1: What is the most influential characteristic that determined voting decisions of urban and rural electorates during the 2019 gubernatorial election in Southwest Nigeria?

The study found that opinion leadership characteristics were more linked to urban electorates' followership of opinion leaders than the rural electorate. This could be as a result of the higher level of education and exposure of the urban electorate as urban electorates are presumed to be better educated and exposed than the rural electorate. Their level of education could help in clearer appreciation of such characteristics. This finding also confirms the position of knowledge gap theory stating that knowledge, like other forms of wealth, is often differentially distributed throughout a social system because of the differences in socio-economic status.

The study also revealed that perceived reputation, social status, and educational attainment were considered by both urban and rural electorates as the most influential characteristics of opinion leaders. This finding agrees with the findings of Chen, Glass and McCartney (2016) that opinion leaders with higher reputation were able to persuade their epistemic neighbours, converge to them more quickly and so attract more followers. This finding also confirms one of the assumptions of the two-step flow theory that opinion leaders are considered influential because of their personality strength.

The study also revealed that urban electorates rated political status as one of the most influential characteristics of opinion leaders while their rural counterparts rated political status low. The inclusion of political status in the list of the most influential characteristics by urban electorates is also a pointer to their ability to assess issues appropriately. The issue of voting decision is political and that must have informed their inclusion of political status of the

opinion leaders as a key characteristic. Their ability to access issues more appropriately confirms one of the propositions of knowledge gap theory that people of higher socio-economic status are versed in reading and comprehension and are therefore better in selective exposure, acceptance and appreciation of issues.

Research Question 2: What is the intervening influence of monetary inducement on the relationship between opinion leaders and voting decisions of urban and rural electorates during the 2019 gubernatorial election in Southwest Nigeria?

The descriptive analysis showed that the connection between monetary and material inducements and followership of opinion leaders was low among rural electorates while it showed that the connection between material inducement and followership of opinion leaders was high among urban electorates.

This finding negates the findings of Gotlieb (2014) that opinion leaders were used as agents by political parties to distribute money, which consequently influenced the voting decisions of the electorate. It is also important to note that this finding must not be misconstrued as the act of vote buying itself by politicians on election day. What this revelation simply means is that people did not follow opinion leaders' advice because of monetary and material incentives. Therefore, this finding has not negated the findings of Adamu, Ocheni and Ibrahim (2016) that electorates were willing to sell their votes to the highest bidder. It did not also negate the findings of Omar (2018) that vote buying was the most dominant of the factors determining the voting decision of the electorate.

Research Question 3: What is the intervening influence of material inducement on the relationship between opinion leaders and voting decisions of urban and rural electorates during the 2019 gubernatorial election in Southwest Nigeria?

The study discovered that the connection between material inducement and the followership of opinion leaders was high among urban participants while it was low among rural participants. Urban electorates indicated that the use of opinion leaders in their communities to offer job opportunities, to nominate people for holy pilgrimage, to promise scholarship opportunities and for provision of essential community needs made them to follow the advice of opinion leaders while rural electorates said such

considerations did not really make them to follow the advice of opinion leaders. This means there is more connection between material inducement and followership of opinion leaders among urban participants than rural participants. The implication is that urban electorates are more interested in material things that could guarantee job security and a secured future for them than the rural electorates. This position can be explained in terms of the level of experience of the urban electorate to the antics of politicians in terms of unfulfilled promises. This particular finding was also reinforced by the qualitative approach. Some of the opinion leaders interviewed in the urban areas explained that politicians did not give them money to distribute, rather they were offering material gestures like drilling of boreholes, rehabilitation of roads, building wards in hospitals and reconstruction of damaged bridges. This finding aligns with one of the postulates of the rational choice theory that says- rationality of voters is measured in terms of their ability to weigh the expected benefits of all alternatives available to them.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

The most influential characteristics of opinion leaders both in urban and rural areas during the 2019 gubernatorial election were reputation, social status, and educational attainment. Majority of urban electorates were influenced by material inducements because of the thinking that a bird in the hand is worth more than ten in the bush. This must be as a result of failed promises on the part of politicians. Both urban and rural electorates did not follow opinion leaders' advice because of monetary inducement.

Electorates in urban and rural areas must not yield to the influence of just any opinion leaders when making their voting decisions as it was found that most opinion leaders were followed, not on the strength of their credibility but, on the basis of reputation, social status, educational attainments and political status. Rather, they should look for opinion leaders who combine credibility with other characteristics when considering the type of opinion leaders to listen to.

Urban electorates should be wary of opinion leaders who act as intermediary between the electorate and politicians to provide material items such as drilling of boreholes, grading of roads, building of wards in hospitals and purchase of transformers. In most cases, the things they bring are not even durable and they

will not see them again until when seeking re-election.

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