



Interpersonal Communication and its Influence on Vote Buying in 2023 Anambra South Senatorial Election in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined the influence of interpersonal communication on vote buying in the 2023 Anambra South senatorial election in Nigeria. Clientelism theory and the Two Step Flow Model of Communication formed the theoretical underpinning for the study. The research was a descriptive survey, data were collected through a multi-stage sampling technique and were analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages. Results obtained show that senatorial candidates used interpersonal communication in vote canvassing and buying; incidentally the electorate perceived vote buying as good and acceptable aimed at assuaging their poverty. The effect is such that that the highest bidder coast home to victory. We hereby suggest more stringent electoral laws that are capable of handling the danger of vote buying, corporal punishment to perpetrators, massive sensitization of the general electorate on the ugly effect of vote buying by civil societies and lovers of democracy and a united force of the masses against manipulation by political gladiators.

Keywords: Interpersonal communication, political information, electorate perception, vote buying, free and fair elections.

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Introduction

A look at the salient features of democracy shows that they revolve around elections. Ifegwu, and Okere (2019) aver that the vital indices of democracy include but not limited to:

Free and fair election, compliance to rule of law, Independence of the judiciary, Independence of the INEC, Existence of opposition party, Respect for people's franchise, Popular participation, Periodic election, Separation of power and Check and balance etc.



In the same vein, the UN General Assembly on 2004 adopted a resolution that lays out seven essential elements of democracy, including: • Separation and balance of power • Independence of the judiciary • A pluralistic system of political parties and organisations • Respect for the rule of law • Accountability and transparency • Free, independent and pluralistic media • Respect for human and political rights; e.g., freedoms of association and expression; the right to vote and to stand in elections.(Meyers, 2011 in Ifegwu, and Okere, 2019). However the most important element of democracy is popular sovereignty. The ability of the members of a political community to see their demands reflected in public policies which generates trust and a sense of their political efficacy that are essential to the maintenance of democratic political institutions (Godek, 2017 in Ifegwu, and Okere, 2019). On the other hand, where the government stages an election and manipulates its outcome in advance, democracy is under siege. . Electoral malpractice entails the manipulation of electoral processes outcomes so as to substitute personal or partisan benefit for public interest. It involves a process by which the rules and regulations that govern the conduct of elections are manipulated to favour specific interests (Africa policy conversation, 2022).

Ifegwu (2023) opined that the effect of electoral manipulation is devastating and injurious to democratic consolidation in Nigeria. First of all it enthrones the incompetent in terms of accountability, integrity and responsibility. This therefore affects governance and breeds corruption in the system. Electoral violence, chaos, anarchy and unrest that characterizes electoral malpractice leads to loss of lives and property and general insecurity. Unfortunately, the perpetrators of these heinous acts are never brought to book because of their alliance to the unscrupulous political actors. Consequently there is a lack of social transformation, economic advancement and national development. The implication of these are that the masses are short-changed. The dividend of democracy is not delivered to the people since these political gladiators know that their mandate does not emanate from the people. Moreover they see politics as a big time business where they spend money and recoup money. One of the means that election could be manipulated is through vote buying. The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), a non-governmental organisation reported vote buying was very pronounced in the 2023 general election in Nigeria. The CDD preliminary statement said data from its 1,500 observers deployed across the country showed there were more cases of vote-buying during the elections. The report further states that in the South-East Nigeria and



Anambra state in particular party agents used materials, phones and other souvenirs to entice voters. (Punch Newspaper 2023).

Anunike, Ifegwu and Anunike (2024) acknowledged the presence of vote buying in the 2023 presidential election in Anambra state, Nigeria. They further found out that paucity of funds occasioned by naira redesign frustrated vote buying; hence, the electorate voted with little or no influence of financial inducement. Ologbenla and Waziri (2012), Ovwasa (2013) and Matenga (2016) see vote buying as a business or contract in which voters sell their votes to the highest bidder. In so doing, political parties, political office seekers and their representatives buy votes from electorates. Vote buying has steadily grown in magnitude. It also involves sharing of cash, food and valuable items among the electorate by politicians and/or parties during elections. It is not only a monetary transaction but also exchange of goods and services. In another word, it is a gratification a voter receives from an inducer in order to cast his/her vote in a particular way. The vote seller, could as well, be the one inducing the buyer- political party, officer seeker or their representatives to buy their vote.

Section 2 of the Nigeria electoral Act 2006 as amended outlined vote buying as follows:

- (a) Direct or indirect offering or aiding in offering inducement in any form whatsoever to a person or political campaign for the purpose of corrupt influencing the person or any other person to support or return from supporting a political party or candidate;
- (b) Direct or indirect giving or offering to give money or valuable consideration to any person during a political campaign in order to induce that person or any other person to support or refrain from supporting a political party or candidate.
- (c) Accepting any inducement, money or valuable consideration from any person, candidates or political party in order to compel that person or any other person to support or return from supporting a political party or candidate.

The Anambra State South Senatorial zone comprises seven local governments of the state. They are Orumba North, Orumba South, Aguata, Nnewi North, Nnewi South, Ekwusigo and Ihiala. Elections into the senatorial seats were held on 25th February 2023. It was highly competitive among Senator Ifeanyi Ubah of Young Progressive Party (YPP), Chukwuma Umeoji of All Progressive Congress (APC), Chris Ubah of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Obinna Uzor of Labour Party (LP), and Chris Azubogu of All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) among others.



Ochonogor (2016), posits that communication is critical in any society as it provides information that enables people to comprehend, follow and be involved in development initiatives. Some of the functions of the mass media is to offer the citizens information of current events in politics (Aliede, 2003, p.30).

Political information is transmitted not only through mass media but also through social interactions such as interpersonal communication. McQuail and Windahl (1981, p.62) aver that the mass media set both political and economic agenda for people; hence, such issues become topical and dominate public discussion. The political discussions provide a rich environment for political discussion through interpersonal communication (Beck, et al 2002). Interpersonal communication involves the exchange of information, messages, and ideas between two or more people. This takes the form of face-to-face conversation, phone calls, emails and video conferences. Terra (2023) adds that interpersonal communication includes ‘accurate ideas of our perception, expectation and concepts’.

Many studies have shown the influence of social media and conventional mass media on vote buying in elections. There are few studies that border on interpersonal communication and vote buying, especially the electorate perception of the menace in Nigeria. However, the onus of this work is to investigate the interplay of interpersonal communication and vote buying focusing on the 2023 Anambra state South Senatorial election, Nigeria, spotlighting the electorate perception of vote buying in the said election. The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To ascertain how interpersonal communication aid the process of vote buying in the 2023 Anambra South senatorial elections;
2. To examine the senatorial candidates use of interpersonal communication on vote buying in the election;
3. To evaluate the type of interpersonal communication the senatorial candidates used in vote buying in the election;
4. To evaluate the electorate perception of vote buying in the 2023 senatorial election;
5. To evaluate the influence of vote buying on the outcome of the Anambra South senatorial elections. The following research questions were raised:
 1. How does interpersonal communication aid the process of vote buying in the 2023 Anambra South senatorial elections?



2. How did senatorial candidates use interpersonal communication on vote buying in the Anambra South senatorial election?
3. What type of interpersonal communication did senatorial candidates used in vote buying during the election?
4. What is the electorate perception of vote buying in the 2023 senatorial election?
5. What is the influence of vote buying on the outcome of the Anambra South senatorial elections?

Theoretical Framework

The study is hinged on Clientelism theory and the Two-step Flow model of communication.

The theory is based on the principle which allows both clients and patrons to gain advantage from others' support (Graham 2004). It is also an exchange of goods and services for political support; a political patronage with any form of inducement.

According to the political scientist Allen Hicken, it is generally thought that there are four key elements of clientelistic relationships:

Dyadic relationships: Simply, these are two-way relationships.

- Contingency: Delivery of a service to a citizen by a politician or broker is contingent on the citizen's actions on behalf of the politician or party through which they are receiving services.
- Hierarchy: The politician or party is in a higher position of power than the citizen.
- Iteration: The relationship is not a one-off exchange but rather form of inducements is central to clientelistic practice.

Stokes, et al (2013) see clientelism as the exchange of goods and services for political support, often involving an implicit or explicit quid-pro-quo. Electoral clientelism has featured predominantly in Nigeria's democratic politics. In general, the relationship is not a one-off exchange, but rather, ongoing. Clientelism theory was adopted to explain the linkage between Nigeria's electoral process and vote-buying, focusing on the 2023 senatorial election. The theory is related to the study since it makes a strong link between the electoral process and vote-buying in a democratic state such as Nigeria.



Two-Step Flow Model of Communication.

The two-step flow model was formulated in 1948 by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet in the book *The People's Choice*, after research into voters' decision-making processes during the 1940 U.S. presidential election. It was further developed by Lazarsfeld together with Elihu Katz in the book *Personal Influence* (1955). The postulation of the theory is that interpersonal interaction has far greater influence on the public than the mass media. It recognizes that the two-step flow of communication begins with messages disseminated through the mass media. The messages are received by opinion leaders who absorb the messages, reinterpret the messages, and recast them. This they pass to an unsuspecting audience. This theory is relevant to this study because it is important to understand how interpersonal communication through a two-way model of communications plays a role in the perception of electorates towards vote buying in Nigeria.

Methodology

This research design for this study is a survey. Questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection. A sample of 400 was drawn from the population using a purposive sampling techniques. Multi stage sampling technique was used to select senatorial zones, local governments, towns, villages and individuals. In line with the above, the stages of sampling technique used for this study are presented below: Stage one: Since the study focuses on the seven local governments that constituted the Anambra South senatorial zone of Nigeria, all the seven local governments in the senatorial zone were first of all selected. The local governments are Orumba North, Orumba South, Aguata, Nnewi North, Nnewi South, Ekwusigo and Ihiala respectively. The seven local governments were categorized as seven clusters. Stage two: Here, the researchers purposively selected three local governments from the seven local governments. This was based on three characteristics of urban, semi urban and rural areas of the senatorial zone. Therefore, Nnewi North local government was selected for urban areas; Aguata local government was selected to represent a semi urban area and Orumba South local government represented rural area.

Stage three: In the local government selected, simple random sampling was used to draw Nnewi town from Nnewi local government, Ekwulobia from Aguata local government and Owerri Ezukala from Orumba North local government. The same simple random sampling was used to draw equal samples from the three towns to ensure equal chances of selection.



Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected from the field for this study were collated, analyzed and presented using tables and simple percentages below.

Demographic Data

Table 1: Bio Data Distribution of Respondent

Bio Data	Cluster	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	232	58
	Female	168	42
		400	100
Marital Status	Married	124	31
	Singles	232	58
	Divorced	32	8
	Widow/widower	12	3
		400	100
Age Distribution	18 – 30	216	54
	31 - 45	120	30
	46 - 60	52	13
	61 and above	12	3
		400	100
Education	FSLs/ O'level	204	51
	OND/NCE	57	14
	HND/BA/BSC/PGD	123	31
	MSC/MA/PHD	16	4
		400	100
Occupation	Public servant	108	27
	Businessmen/women	68	17
	Students	208	52
	Artisan/Technician	16	4
		400	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023



Table 1 above shows that among four hundred (400) respondents 232(58%) were male while 168(42%) were female. Also, 124(31%) of the respondents are married; 232(58%) were single; 32(8%) were divorced while 12(4%) were widows/widowers.

In age distribution, 216(54%) of the respondents were within 18 - 30 years; 120(30%) were within 31 - 45 years; 52(13%) were within 46 - 60 years while 12(3%) were from 61 years and above.

In educational distribution of respondents, 204(51%) respondents hold first school leaving certificate or ordinary level certificate; 57(14%) of the respondents hold OND/NCE certificate; 123(31%) of the respondents hold HND/B.A/B.Sc/B.Ed/PGD degrees; while 16(4%) respondents hold M.sc/M.A/MED/PhD degrees.

In occupational distribution of respondents, 108(27%) respondents were public servants; 68(17%) of the respondents were business men/women; 208(52%) of the respondents were students while 16(4%) of the respondents were artisans/technicians.

The implication of the above is that there were more male electorates in the sample. The singles who constituted more youths were more in the population and sample. The first school leaving certificate/ O level holders were more in the sample. This is followed by first degree holders' respondents. There were more students in the sample.

RQ1: How does interpersonal communication aided the process of vote buying in the 2023 Anambra South senatorial elections?

Table 2: Showing interpersonal communication and the process of vote buying in the 2023 Anambra South senatorial elections

Variables	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agreed	204	51
Agreed	122	30.5
Disagreed	56	14
No opinion	18	4.5
Total	400	100

Source: Data from Field Work (2024).



Table 2 displays how interpersonal communication aided the process of vote buying in the 2023 Anambra South senatorial elections. Here, 204(51%) of the respondents strongly agreed; 122(30.5%) of the respondents agreed; 56(14%) of the respondents disagreed while 18(5%) of the respondents expressed no view on the matter. This implies that the majority of the population of the electorate within the senatorial District agreed that interpersonal communication is a tool for vote buying during the 2023 senatorial election.

RQ2: How did senatorial candidates use interpersonal communication on vote buying in the Anambra South senatorial election?

Table 3: Senatorial Candidates Use of Interpersonal Communication for Vote Buying in 2023 Elections.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Visit opinion leaders with cash	17	4
Direct distribution of incentives and gifts to electorates	96	24
Last minute citing of projects in communities	76	19
Cash for vote through their agents to the electorate at the polling booths	211	53
Total	400	100

Source: Data from Field Work (2024).

Table 3 shows senatorial candidates' use of interpersonal communication in vote buying in the 2023 election. Here 17(4%) respondents said that the political office seekers visited opinion leaders with cash. Also, 96(24%) of the respondents opined that the political office seekers distributed incentives and gifts to the electorate. Respondents who indicated last minute citing of projects by the senatorial candidates were 76(19%), while 211(53%) of the respondents indicated that senatorial distributed cash to the electorate through their agents at the polling booths. The implication of this is that majority of vote buying were done on the election day at the polling centre or booth.



RQ 3: What type of interpersonal communication did senatorial candidates used in vote buying during the election?

Table 4: Showing type of Interpersonal Communication Used by the Electorate in Vote Buying Discourse.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Interpersonal relationship with family, friends & colleagues	212	53
Dyadic communication (Two Individuals)	105	26
Two step flow communication	42	11
Visit for vote buying discourse	41	10
Total	400	100

Source: Data from Field Work (2024).

Table 4 displays the type of interpersonal communication used by the electorate for vote buying discourse. In this, 212(53%) of the respondents indicated interpersonal relationship with family, friends and colleagues; 105(24%) of the respondents voted for dyadic communication; 42(11%) of the respondents opined two-step flow of communication while 41(10%) of the respondents visit to one another. The implication of this is that interpersonal relationships with family, friends and colleagues was largely used in the election for vote buying.

RQ 4: What is the electorate perception of vote buying in the 2023 senatorial election?

Table 5: Showing Electorate Perception of Vote Buying in 2023 Senatorial Elections

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Share of democracy dividends	92	23
Good in order to assuage poverty	220	55
Evil to democracy that should be avoided	-	-
Normal Nigeria corrupt practice	88	22
Total	400	100

Source: Data from Field Work (2024).

Table 5 shows the respondents perception of vote buying in the 2023 senatorial election. Here, 92(23%) respondents saw it as a share of democracy dividend; 220(55%) respondents opined that it was good in order to assuage poverty; no respondents indicated that it was evil to



democracy that should be avoided. Also, 88(22%) respondents were of the opinion that it was normal Nigeria corrupt practice. The implication of this is there more than half of the respondent perceived vote buying in the election as a way to assuage electorate poverty.

RQ5: What is the influence of vote buying on the outcome of the 2023 Anambra South senatorial elections?

Table 6: showing the influence of vote buying on the outcome of the 2023 Anambra South senatorial elections

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strong Influence	223	51
Influential	97	24
Little Influence	57	20
No Influence	23	5
Total	400	100

Source: Data from Field Work (2024).

Table 6 shows the influence of vote buying on the outcome of the Anambra South senatorial elections. Here, 223(51%) said that it has strong influence; 97(24%) respondents saw it as being influential; 57(20%) indicated little influence on the electorate while 23(5%) respondents saw no influence. The implication is that the menace of vote buying affected the outcome on the in the 2023 senatorial election strongly.

Discussion of the Findings

The discussion of findings was done using the research question that guided the study. The first research question was asked to determine how interpersonal communication aided the process of vote buying in the 2023 Anambra South senatorial elections. From the responses, it is obvious that the mechanism for the vote buying syndrome is mostly through interpersonal communication. The senatorial candidates and their cronies resort to this level of communication because of its effectiveness and the nature of the business of vote buying. This finding supports Nkwocha (2019) in his study finding that the South-East audience largely used interpersonal communication in the 2019 presidential election in vote buying.

The second research question aimed at ascertaining how the senatorial candidate used interpersonal communication in vote buying in the 2023 senatorial election. The result of the analysis is in table 3 shows the senatorial candidates engaged agents whose job was to approach



and bargain with the electorates. Hence, the senatorial candidates bought votes through their agents at polling centres in the election aside other means deployed. The result of the findings supports Ezinwa, Ugwu, Odi and Ekwe (2016) who found out in their study that presidential candidates of the 2015 election in Nigeria bought votes through their agents at the polling stations and booths.

The third research question was to find out the type of interpersonal communication the candidates used in the 2023 senatorial elections in Anambra state. The result of the analysis found in table 4 where 212(53%) of respondents identified interpersonal relationships with family, friends and colleagues as used by the candidates in vote buying in the 2023 senatorial election. Nsikak, Idiong, Aniekan and Etimbuk (2023) found out in their study that interpersonal relations among family members and friends were prevalent in 2023 senatorial elections. Hence this study is in sync their findings.

The fourth research question on the perception of Anambra state electorate of vote buying in the 2023 senatorial election. The answer is found on table 5. Majority of the electorate 220(55%) perceived vote buying as acceptable because it eases of their poverty albeit momentarily. This findings supports Nkwocha (2019) who found out that the average Nigerian electorate is poor, hence could not resist vote selling to political office seekers. The electorate in some cases, sought for it as their condition of coming out to vote. Aunuike, Ifegwu and Anunike (2024) on the other hand found audience perception of naira redesign that it brought paucity of cash and frustrated vote buying in 2023 presidential election in Nigeria. This finding is at variance with that of Nkwocha (2019) and this study because the election was presidential election and the respondents were the social media users as difference from the senatorial election and electorates as respondents of this study. This trend portents danger to the electoral system where the electorate will ask for inducement before exercising their franchise.

The answer to the fifth research question on the influence of vote buying on the outcome of the 2023 Anambra South senatorial elections is found in Table 6 as 223(51%) respondents said that it has strong influence; 97(24%) respondents saw it as being influential; 57(20%) indicated little influence on the electorate while 23(5%) respondents saw no influence. The responses shows that vote buying actually influenced the outcome of the 2023 senatorial election. Ipso facto, it is the highest bidder that coast home with the victory.



Summary of Findings

Interpersonal communication aided the process of vote buying in the 2023 Anambra South senatorial election. The senatorial candidates in the election also used interpersonal communication of various kinds to reach the electorate. They mostly employed vote canvassing and buying at the polling centres through their agents.

Interpersonal relationships with family, friends and colleagues was used by the candidates in vote buying in the 2023 senatorial election. The electorate of the 2023 election perceived vote buying as good and acceptable aimed at assuaging their poverty. Finally, the influence of interpersonal communication on electorate perception of vote buying in the 2023 Anambra South senatorial election is strong.

Conclusion

In the light of the above findings of the study it is indisputable that interpersonal communication aided vote buying during the 2023 Anambra South senatorial election. Unfortunately the majority of the electorate perceived vote buying as a good omen because of the momentary gratification they receive from political players. The implication therefore is that Nigeria is far from practicing participatory democracy since the electoral system and institution give room (albeit lope holes) to manipulate the electoral process.

Suggestion

Based on the findings, we suggest the following:

1. The electoral laws should be made more stringent to discourage and nip in the bud menace of vote buying during election.
2. The agents used in perpetrating this nefarious act should be trapped and dealt with to serve as deterrent to others.
2. The civil societies, pro-democratic organizations and indeed all lovers of democracy should intensify their efforts at sensitizing the general electorate on the ugly effect of vote buying and electoral manipulations.
3. The masses should unite beyond any affiliation or divide to stand up against the manipulation of the electoral system through vote buying and other nefarious activities.



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