



## OWERRI RESIDENT'S PERCEPTION OF THE INFLUENCE OF RADIO SENSITIZATION PROGRAMME AGAINST VOTE RACKETEERING TOWARDS THE 2023 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

Election is as a result, one of the cardinal features of democracy, which however, is constantly assaulted through the phenomenon of vote racketeering. The study examined Owerri resident's perception of the influence of radio sensitization programme against vote racketeering towards the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria. The investigation was anchored on the agenda setting theory and psychological theory of perception. The survey method was adopted; the study has a sample size of 384 which was arrived at using the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator. The multi-stage sampling technique was used while questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. Findings revealed that the extent residents of Owerri metropolis are exposed to "Peoples' Assembly" on Hot 99.5 FM and "Face Off" on Groove 98.1 FM is high at 32.6%. Also, the residents' knowledge level towards vote racketeering as a result of their exposure to "Peoples' Assembly" and "Face Off" programmes is very high at an average mean score of 3.6. Result also revealed that at an average mean score of 3.4, the respondents have been positively influenced by these programmes. Further result indicated that the residents perceive the influence of "Peoples' Assembly" and "Face Off" programmes in tackling the menace of vote racketeering ahead of the 2023 presidential election in a positive light at an average means of 3.4. The study concluded that in an effort to nip this electoral malpractice in the bud, "Peoples' Assembly" on Hot 99.5 FM and "Face Off" on Groove 98.1 FM radio programmes have been effective and efficacious in educating and sensitizing the audience on the consequences of vote racketeering and the need to curtail the act with proper re-orientation ahead of the 2023 Presidential election. The study recommended inter-alia, a close synergy between INEC and the broadcast media in producing more public enlightenment programmes that aims at fighting against vote racketeering in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Vote-racketeering, perception, influence, radio, sensitization programmes.

### Introduction

One of the prominent pillars, supporting and determining the quality of a democracy is the electoral process. That is why Idowu, Anikwe and Asekhamhe (2020) averred that in many nations across the globe, election is the accepted process through which individuals are chosen to represent a people or community in various organs of government. Egwemi (2014) opines that election as a process under democracy through which people or the electorate exercise their freedom and inalienable right to organize their life and to choose those whom they delegate their rights as representatives. Similarly, Animashaun (2010) cited in Vande

(2017) corroborates that election is a democratic process that provides citizens with the freedom to choose their rulers and to decide on public policy. Under any democratic system, citizens who are legally qualified to exercise franchise are provided with opportunity to choose political alternatives and to make decisions that express their preferences. It is no surprise that modern States regard periodic and regular elections as a core attribute of democracy. As submitted by Baidoo, Dankwa and Eshun (2018), elections seem to have become a major factor in the stabilization and democratization of emerging democracies. They also maintain that election forms an important pillar that places the power to govern with the people and is a litmus test for democratic institutions.

Vande (2017) submit that the sanctity of choice embedded in the modern democratic idea presupposes that the electorate has the latitude to choose those who would govern them in a regular, free, fair and credible electoral process. He further stated that for a legitimate government to rule, the people must have the luxury of choosing their leaders through the processes that meet international good practices. This implies that fraudulent elections fall below the accepted democratic norms, anywhere in the world. Thus, democratic self-government is incompatible with electoral farces (Ojo, 2008) cited in Vande (2017). Stated differently, regular, free, fair and credible election is a condition sine qua non for a political system to be termed democratic, stable and secure.

Baidoo, et al (2018) capture the concept of vote racketeering as the use of money and direct benefits to influence voter's choice and decision on the voting ground. Similarly, Egbo and Uche (2012) in Idowu, Anikwe and Asekhamhe (2020) posit that vote racketeering is any form of financial, material or promissory inducement or reward by a candidate, political party, agent or supporter to influence a voter to cast his or her vote in favour of a given candidate or even abstain from doing so in order to enhance the chances of a particular contestant to win an election. Suffice to add that the 2023 Presidential Election is a highly competitive and fierce exercise among four more prominent candidates, Tinubu Bola Ahmed of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic (PDP), Obi Peter Gregory of the Labour Party (LP) and Rabiun Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP). Moreover, the election is being contested by 18 registered political parties, with an unprecedented qualified 18 presidential candidates by INEC. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has scheduled the election to hold on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2023 across the 36 states of the nation including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

To this end, the media is saddled with a social responsibility role to the society. The media have an influential role to play in sensitizing and conscientizing all critical stakeholders to the menacing issue of vote racketeering using appropriate media strategies. This lend credence to Ochonogor (2016) when he opined that communication is central to any attempt at inducing change in any society as it provides information that will enable people to understand and appreciate the need to participate in development initiatives. The mass media (radio, television, newspaper and magazine) are vested with the duties of educating, informing and enlightening the people in order to keep them abreast with the happenings in the society (Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022). Research has shown that radio generates much power for positive change in the society. Radio has the power to hold government accountable; to mobilize members of public, especially those in the rural areas, to achieve a common social, political, economic or cultural goal (Adekoya, Akintoye & Adegoke, 2015) cited in (Emecheta & Onyebuchi 2021).

This is why programmes like "Peoples' Assembly" on Hot 99.5 FM, a one-hour (live) current affairs phone-in-programme aired weekdays, Mondays to Fridays 8:am to 9: am; and "Face Off" on Groove 98.1 FM, a one-hour phone-in-programme aired weekdays 9:am-9:55:am were created to address topical issues of the moment, especially issues on politics and money-politics (vote racketeering). These are phone-programmes whose core aims are to educate, inform, sensitize and enlighten the audience through participation where the listeners call the presenters with their cell phones and contribute to the programmes. However, this

study focused on the influence of radio programmes because it has been established that media tendency to shape or influence public opinion and behaviour is very high (Murtada, 2017) cited in (Emecheta & Onyebuchi 2021). This therefore, becomes the gamut against which the study seeks to examine Owerri resident's perception of the influence of radio sensitization programme against vote racketeering towards the 2023 Presidential election in Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

Since Nigeria returned to the democratization process in 1999, the conduct of elections has left much to be desired, because the electoral process has been characterized by electoral fraud, including vote buying, electoral violence among other violations, undermining the legitimacy and good government. According to Nkwede and Abah (2019), in the democratization process in Nigeria, vote-racketeering seems to have taken the centre stage. The electorate trade their vote for certain outcomes that are important to them". Bratton (2008) cited in Nkwede and Abah (2019) opine that one in five Nigerians has experienced an offer for their vote. The rewards offered by Nigerian politicians include money, commodities such as food like rice, bread, salt, onion, groundnut oil and trinkets in the form of umbrellas, bags and other valuables. Leading to Olaito (2018) to aver that election period in Nigeria can be compared to a season of give and take with lots of commercial activities in the red-light street.

Monetary inducements have been part of the electoral process in Nigeria in the last three elections but the incidence of vote racketeering became so glaring and has discredited the democratic process in the 2019 General Election (Vande, 2017) cited in n (Adigun, 2019; Dauda, Adamu, & Ahmodu-Tijan, 2019). Election is as a result, one of the cardinal features of democracy, which however, is constantly assaulted through the phenomenon of vote racketeering. In addition to these factors, concern for vote-racketeering during elections has assumed a worrisome dimension in Nigeria. The outcome results to emergence of wrong candidate, stagnation of development, massive threat to democracy, negative image, abject poverty, dwindling life expectancy as a result of the absence of good medical services, extreme hunger and starvation, and electoral malpractice become the dividend or product of vote racketeering of which the citizens suffer until another political tenure.

In an effort to nip this electoral malpractice in the bud, Peoples' Assembly on Hot 99.5 FM and Face Off on Groove 98.1 FM have been created as channel to forestall the continuity of this political malfeasance. The worry of this study therefore, is how far these radio programmes have fared in the campaign to curtail or eliminate this hydra-headed 'monster' of vote-racketeering ahead of the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2023 general election in Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent are residents of Owerri metropolis exposed to "Peoples' Assembly" on Hot 99.5 FM and "Face Off" on Groove 98.1 FM?
2. What is the knowledge level of the residents towards vote racketeering as a result of their exposure to "Peoples' Assembly" and "Face Off" programmes?
3. What is the influence of the programmes in sensitizing the residents and curbing the menace of vote racketeering towards the 2023 Presidential election?
4. What is the perception of the residents towards the influence of the programmes in tackling the menace of vote racketeering ahead of the 2023 presidential election?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

## **An Overview of Vote-Racketeering**

Vote-racketeering otherwise known as “vote-buying” “voters-inducement”, “electoral treating”, “vote-trading”, “vote-selling” or “money exchange-hand politics” has become a recurring feature in most countries' electoral process. Scholars (e.g. Matenga, 2016; Beetseh & Akpoo, 2015; Ovwasa, 2013; Schaffer & Schedler, 2005) view the act of vote-racketeering as economic exchange, a contract, or perhaps an auction in which the voter sells his or her vote to the highest bidder. It is also described as “when candidates buy and/or citizens/electorate sell votes, like they buy and sell apples, shoes, or television sets” (Schaffer & Schedler, 2005). Rigger (1994) asserts that vote-racketeering is more than a mere economic transaction; instead, it is a combination of economic exchange and social practices. In this context, vote-racketeering refers to the act of exchanging one's own vote for material goods. Some of the factors that encourage this act may include but not limited to poverty, political corruption, compromised electoral management body (EMB), militarized politics, nature and character of Nigerian politics, lack of trust and confidence in the electoral process, perceived election rigging, and ignorance or illiteracy. However, in Third World countries, Nigeria being inclusive, poor people view elections period as harvest times when politicians and their political representatives fulfil their financial obligations to support them, with the belief that the opportunity comes but once in three or four years because once their political goals are realized, politicians are no longer accessible until another election period. This unimaginable trend portends great danger to the achievement of credible election, good governance and sustainable democracy.

## **Negative Effect of Vote Racketeering After Election**

Westminster Foundation for Democracy (2018) avowed or admitted that in Nigeria, voters are offered money, commodities like food, clothing and jobs. This practice rests on payoffs that are not directly and explicitly tied to reciprocity in the polling booth. It is assumed that the public is not aware of the negative effects of selling votes. Money bag politicians are after their personal interest not the concern of the public.

- **Denying of dividend of democracy:** Chukwurah et al (2019) aver that the democracy comes with bumper harvest in a democratized milieu; people enjoy dividends like infrastructural development, scholarship, access to social amenities, robust social services. But the trend of vote buying and selling, these dividends are threatened and development is drowsy (Odia, 2018).
- **Emergence of wrong candidate:** A candidate whose candidature is free from ambivalence, disgruntlement and idiosyncrasies, but if the wrong candidate emerge people suffer. Selling of votes facilitate the emergence of wrong candidate, the money bag politicians are desperate to bag power at all cost.
- **Stagnation of Development:** The issue of vote buying is lethargic to development. Selling of vote entails that the social amenities that would have been brought to electorate were sold. The road in the community that needs tarring has been sold to greedy politicians who give the voters four to five thousand naira to vote for them (Chukwurah et al., 2019).
- **Negative image:** The negative image is attributed to corruption, electoral offences; Nigerians should shun any act that would depict our country in a bad light.
- **Poverty:** United Nations index of poverty in Nigeria asserted that an average Nigerian feed less than one dollar per day (Chukwurah et al., 2019). This validation is true to some extent because, if take an inventory is taken to ascertain the level of poverty amongst Nigerians, you will concur with UN position.
- **Dwindling life Expectancy:** Poor medical attention has made a lot of people to die. Malnutrition and starvation have been a causative factor in the demise of many individuals in Nigeria (Yiaga Africa, 2018). For example, the issue of youth's irregular migration in Nigeria was as a result of those seeking for a better life, in which thousands died on their way scavenging for greener pasture in foreign lands.

- **Electoral malpractice:** The effect of vote racketeering will always be enormous. There will be likelihood of massive malpractices and irregularities. Wrong leaders will emerge as winners of the forthcoming elections because they are going to employ coercive measures and aggressively aggravate vote buying gimmicks to ensure they win.

### **Review of “The People’s Assembly” and “Face Off” Radio Programmes**

“The People’s Assembly” is a one-hour (live) current affairs programme on Hot 99.5 FM radio, Owerri. It is a product, a brand or creation of the News and Current Affairs Department of Hot 99.5 FM, Owerri. The main objective of “The People’s Assembly” is to educate, inform, and enlighten the audience through participation where the listeners call the presenters with their cell phones and contribute to the programme. “The People’s Assembly” is broadcast weekdays Monday to Friday between 8am and 9am anchored by Anthony Ugbekile. However, the Friday edition of the programme is more like a review of the various issues earlier treated or discussed from Monday to Thursday. The idea behind the Friday review was to enable those who missed or could not call earlier during the broadcast to do so. It is equally to give the issues discussed earlier prominence and salience in line with the agenda-setting theory. Topical issues of public interest and importance are usually brought up for discussion and analysis. Members of the assembly are guests and callers from different parts of Imo state and beyond. Review of local and national newspapers by the presenters and invited reviewer who often times are journalists kick starts the discussion and phone-in segments of the programme.

“Face Off” is also a phone-in-programme on Groove 98.1 FM tagged “Governance, Politics” scheduled weekdays, Mondays through Fridays 9:00am to 9:55am anchored by Paul Chukwu. The programme is a political conflict resolution which seeks to balance between government policies and the disgruntled masses, topical issues of the moment are raised and discussed with invited guests on air and giving room for listener to call in and share their opinions. Often times, issues on vote-racketeering are discussed during the programme.

### **REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES**

Emecheta and Onyebuchi (2021) carried out an investigation on the influence of Hot FM’s “The People’s Assembly” on the political awareness and participation of electorate in Imo State and it revealed that the exposure of electorate in Imo State to “The People’s Assembly” on Hot 99.5 FM is high at 50%; the level of their political awareness as a result of this exposure is high at 71%; and the extent “The People’s Assembly” programme has influenced the political participation of electorate in Imo State is at 66.8%. Similarly, Ojo, et al (2020) carried out a study on the evaluation of the television medium as a channel for campaign against vote buying during elections in Nigeria which revealed that television, through enlightenment campaigns, has performed well in its statutory duty of sensitizing the electorates on the danger of vote buying during elections. The study that indicated that corruption, compromise of professional and ethical standards as well as, ownership influence; pose a hindrance to the effectiveness of television as an enlightenment campaign platform against vote buying during elections. In another study “Influence of television political programmes on voters’ opinion in the Nigerian 2015 general election: A study of “Politics Today by Murkthar, Rasheed and Nanoh (2017) showed that ABU undergraduate students watched “Politics Today” television political programmes occasionally and the programme influenced the voting opinion of the students in the 2015 general elections.

Aririguzoh (2015) carried out a study on the role of television broadcasts on voters’ participation in Nigeria’s presidential election indicated that the respondent’s watching television broadcasts led to an increase in their involvement in the election, by making them take specific steps such as going out to register to vote; seeking out more information about contesting candidates and their parties; voluntarily joining campaign teams and political parties; and even persuading others into joining campaign teams and the

voting exercise. Television broadcasts also brought about an increase in the number of topics raised for discussion between these residents and the people significant in their lives. Similarly, another study by Aririguzoh, (2014) in television broadcasts' influence on voters in a presidential election found positive and statistically relevant correlations between respondents' exposure to television broadcasts and their voting. The data showed that television broadcasts actually influenced the voting decisions of the respondents in different degrees. Specifically, exposure to television broadcasts increased the voters' knowledge of the presidential election, of the candidates and of the political parties; made the voters to increase their level of political participation before the presidential election, for example, by registering to vote and actually going to the polling centres to vote and influenced the candidates and parties that they voted for. Lastly, television broadcasts made some of the voters change their minds from voting for their initial choices of candidates, to vote for another candidate.

This current study tends to cover the gap in knowledge and perception of the electorate towards radio programmes on vote racketeering and its monumental consequences as a threat to democracy on the 25<sup>th</sup> February Presidential election in Nigeria as none of the previous studies reviewed closed this gap.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Agenda-Setting Theory**

The theory was propounded by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 American presidential election. According to Banan (2007), the agenda-setting theory is of the view that the public agenda or what kind of thing people discuss, think and worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the news media chose to publicize (Alphonsus, Etumnu, Talabi, Fadeyi, Aiyesimoju, Apuke & Gever, 2022). In essence, it is the news media that raises an issue to a level of public prominence. Wimmer and Dominick (2005) argue that agenda setting research examines the relationship between media priorities and audience priorities in the relative importance of news topics. This means that if the media decides to give the most time and space to covering issues concerning vote racketeering in the society, it will be reduced and it will become the most important item on the audience agenda. The assumption underlying the agenda-setting theory is that the issues by the media are considered important to the public. This theory is relevant to the study in that Hot 99.5 FM's Peoples' Assembly" and Groove 98.1 FM's "Face Off" set agenda on vote racketeering for public discuss through their programmes which transcend to the issue being a salient topic of debate.

### **The Psychological Theory of Perception.**

Perception or what other scholars refer to as social perception according to Nelson and Quick (1997) in Unumeri (2009) 'is the process of interpreting information about another person.' What this definition means is that the outlook one forms about people depends on the amount of information available and the extent to which one is able to correctly decode the information that was acquired. Hence, one may be in possession of the same set of information that others have on a particular situation, person or group but still arrive at different conclusions due to individual differences in the capacity to interpret the information at hand. This theory is relevant to the study in that it explains how the residents interpret and view the influence of the Hot 99.5 FM's Peoples' Assembly" and Groove 98.1 FM's "Face Off" programmes in tackling the menace of vote racketeering ahead of the 2023 presidential election.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The researchers used the survey research design because it is the most suitable in a study of this nature which seeks to elicit the opinions of respondents on the topic being investigated (Tayo-Garbson, Njoku, & Etumnu, 2019). The study has a population of 555,500 according to the 2016 National Population Commission of Nigeria (web), National Bureau of Statistics (web). The sample size of 384 was derived

using the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator. The sampling technique used for this study was the multi-stage sampling technique. The technique required that Owerri metropolis be divided into three local government councils or clusters. The researchers randomly selected two communities from each local government area for proximity and accessibility. The selected communities were, Umuororonjo and Amawom (Owerri municipal); Orji and Amakohia Uratta (Owerri North); Nekede and Obinze (Owerri West). From the communities, non-proportionate sampling was used to select 64 persons in each of the selected communities to represent the sample studied in the communities. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Simple percentages and mean analysis were used to analyse the data.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Out of the 384 copies of the questionnaire that were administered to the respondents, 369 (96.1%) copies were retrieved, found valid and analysed for the study while 15 (3.9%) copies were found invalid.

**Table 1: The extent residents of Owerri metropolis are exposed to “Peoples’ Assembly” on Hot 99.5 FM and “Face Off” on Groove 98.1 FM**

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	100	27.1
High	120	32.6
Moderate	102	27.6
Low	47	12.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Survey, 2023*

**Table 2: Respondent’s response on their knowledge level towards vote racketeering as a result of their exposure to “Peoples’ Assembly” and “Face Off” programmes**

Options	SA	A	D	S D	Mean	Decision
I think it is a dividend for bad governance, bad leadership, emergence of wrong political candidate as the winner, poverty and total suffering to the electorates	205	145	13	6	3.5	Accepted
It is the buying and selling of votes of the electorates on or before the election by the aspirants	220	147	2	-	3.6	Accepted
It also involves the gifting of items or food stuffs by political office aspirants to the electorates in exchange for their votes	209	151	3	3	3.5	Accepted
I think it is money politics and an act of election malpractice	254	115	-	-	3.7	Accepted
<b>Average Mean</b>					<b>3.6</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

**Source: Field survey, 2023**

Decision rule: Given that the benchmark of a 4-point Likert scale for decision is 2.5, it means that if the calculated mean is 2.5-4.0, then the item in question is accepted. However, if the calculated mean is 1-2.4, then the item in question is rejected. Let 1.0-1.5 (Very Low), 1.6-2.2 (Low), 2.3-2.9 (Moderate), 3.0-3.5 (High) and 3.6-4.0 (Very High)

**Table 3: Respondent's response on the influence of the programmes in sensitizing them and curbing the menace of vote racketeering towards the 2023 Presidential election**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
As a result of these programmes, I will vote by choice and not by gift or money in the upcoming Presidential election	187	167	9	3	3.4	Accepted
As a result of these programmes, I will not accept any form of gratification or promises in exchange for my votes	190	156	15	8	3.4	Accepted
As a result of these programmes, I will not be a party to bad governance	198	146	11	14	3.4	Accepted
I think these programmes have influenced me positively on how to use my franchise for good governance	157	171	23	18	3.3	Accepted
<b>Average Mean</b>					<b>3.4</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

**Source: Field survey, 2023**

Decision rule: Given that the benchmark of a 4-point Likert scale for decision is 2.5, it means that if the calculated mean is 2.5-4.0, then the item in question is accepted. However, if the calculated mean is 1-2.4, then the item in question is rejected.

**Table 4: Responses of the respondents on their perception towards the influence of the programmes in tackling the menace of vote racketeering ahead of the 2023 presidential election**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
I think the programmes have helped to inform, educate, sensitize and enlighten me on the consequences of vote racketeering	162	188	12	7	3.4	Accepted
I think the programmes have helped to re-orientate the electorates planning to cast their votes by money/gifts/gratification given to them by the aspirants	149	177	26	18	3.2	Accepted
I think the programmes are eye opener to me as I have learnt from our previous voting mistakes	194	160	11	4	3.5	Accepted



<b>Average Mean</b>		<b>3.4</b>	<b>Accepted</b>
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*Source: Field survey, 2023*

*Decision rule: Given that the benchmark of a 4-point Likert scale for decision is 2.5, it means that if the calculated mean is 2.5-4.0, then the item in question is accepted. However, if the calculated mean is 1-2.4, then the item in question is rejected.*

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings on the extent residents of Owerri metropolis are exposed to “Peoples’ Assembly” on Hot 99.5 FM and “Face Off” on Groove 98.1 FM programmes revealed that 32.6% of the respondents have high level of exposure to the programmes. Correspondingly, this result is in tandem with the findings of Emecheta and Onyebuchi (2021) which revealed that the exposure of electorate in Imo State to “The People’s Assembly” on Hot 99.5 FM is high at 50%. In a slightly differing note, Murkthar, et al (2017) found out in their study that ABU undergraduate students watched “Politics Today” television political programmes occasionally.

Result of the findings indicated that residents of Owerri metropolis are knowledgeable enough about vote racketeering as a result of their exposure to “People’s Assembly” and “Face Off” at an average mean score of 3.6 (N=369) which indicates high extent as they affirmed that It involves the gifting of items or food stuffs by political office aspirants to the electorates in exchange for their votes. This means that the residents knowledge level towards vote racketeering as a result of their exposure to “Peoples’ Assembly” and “Face Off” programmes is very high. This finding aligns with the findings of Emecheta and Onyebuchi (2021) which found out that the level of the political awareness of the electorates in Imo State as a result of their exposure to “The People’s Assembly” programme on Hot 99.5 FM is high at 71%. Also, Aririguzoh (2014) corroborated this finding which showed that exposure to television broadcasts increased the voters’ knowledge of the presidential election, of the candidates and of the political parties. In another related study carried out by Aririguzoh (2015), the result revealed that television broadcasts also brought about an increase in the number of topics raised for discussion between these residents and the people significant in their lives. Theoretically, the agenda setting theory comes in in this finding as result of “The People’s Assembly” and “Face Off” programmes setting the agenda for public discuss/debate on vote racketeering which transcends to knowledge gain to the audience.

Findings on the influence of the programmes in sensitizing the residents and curbing the menace of vote racketeering towards the 2023 Presidential election revealed that at an average mean of 3.4 (N=369) that the respondents have been positively influenced by these programmes in that they affirmed that they will not accept any form of gratification or promises in exchange for their votes and these programmes have influenced them positively on how to use their franchise for good governance. This is in line with the findings of Ojo, Anikwe and Asekhamhe (2020) which revealed that television, through enlightenment campaigns, has performed well in its statutory duty of sensitizing the electorates on the danger of vote buying during elections. This is further supported by Murkthar, Rasheed and Nanoh (2017) in their study which revealed that “Politics Today” television political programmes influenced the voting opinion of the students in the 2015 general elections. Relatively, Aririguzoh (2015) indicated that the respondent’s watching television broadcasts led to an increase in their involvement in the election, by making them take specific steps such as going out to register to vote; seeking out more information about contesting candidates and their parties; voluntarily joining campaign teams and political parties; and even persuading others into joining campaign teams and the voting exercise. Further buttressing this findings, Aririguzoh (2014) investigation showed that television broadcasts actually influenced the voting decisions of the respondents in different degrees. Conclusively, the findings of Emecheta and Onyebuchi (2021) went further to reveal that “The People’s Assembly” programme has influenced the political participation of electorate in Imo State is at 66.8%.

Result of the analysis revealed that at an average mean core of 3.4 (N=369), the residents perceive the influence of the programmes in tackling the menace of vote racketeering ahead of the 2023 presidential election in a positive light, they see the programmes as influential tools that are quite educative, informative that have helped to inform, educate, sensitize and enlighten them on the consequences of vote racketeering; and have helped to re-orientate the electorates planning to cast their votes by money/gifts/gratification given to them by the aspirants on how to cast their votes wisely. This finding underscores the psychological theory of perception which explains how the residents interpret and view the influence of the Hot 99.5 FM's "Peoples' Assembly" and Groove 98.1 FM's "Face Off" programmes in tackling the menace of vote racketeering ahead of the 2023 presidential election.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is no gainsaying the fact that poverty, political corruption, compromised electoral management body (EMB), militarized politics, nature and character of Nigerian politics, lack of trust and confidence in the electoral process, perceived election rigging, and ignorance or illiteracy of the electorate remains the factors that encourage the act of vote racketeering. The aftermath of the act results to emergence of wrong candidate, stagnation of development, massive threat to democracy, negative image, abject poverty, dwindling life expectancy as a result of the absence of good medical services, extreme hunger and starvation. The study therefore concludes that in an effort to nip this electoral malpractice in the bud, "Peoples' Assembly" on Hot 99.5 FM and "Face Off" on Groove 98.1 FM radio programmes have been effective and efficacious in educating and sensitizing the audience on the consequences of vote racketeering and the need to curtail the act with proper re-orientation ahead of the 2023 Presidential election.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. Since the extent residents of Owerri metropolis are exposed to "Peoples' Assembly" on Hot 99.5 FM and "Face Off" on Groove 98.1 FM programmes is high, the researchers recommend more exposure to similar educating programmes in other radio and television stations.
2. Given that the residents' knowledge level towards vote racketeering as a result of their exposure to "Peoples' Assembly" and "Face Off" programmes is very high, the study recommends for the amendment of the Electoral Act 2010 to incorporate electronic voting, among others, as a measure to curbing vote racketeering in Nigeria.
3. Having found out that the respondents have been positively influenced by these programmes, the researchers recommend that more reinforcement programmes be continuously aired by other broadcast stations.
4. Since the residents perceive the influence of "Peoples' Assembly" and "Face Off" programmes in tackling the menace of vote racketeering ahead of the 2023 presidential election in a positive light, the researchers recommend a close synergy between INEC and the broadcast media in producing more public enlightenment programmes that aims at fighting against vote racketeering in Nigeria.

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