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WINNING HEARTS, WINNING VOTES: HOW STORYTELLING ATTRIBUTES SHAPE ELECTORAL OUTCOMES IN POLITICAL MARKETING

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Abstract

As modern political campaigns increasingly rely on storytelling to connect with voters, storytelling has become a central tool in political marketing, and understanding which specific storytelling attributes most effectively influence voter attitudes and electoral outcomes remains important for scholarly discourse. This study examines the effect of storytelling attributes in shaping electoral outcomes in political marketing during the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, and data were collected from 319 registered voters through a structured questionnaire, measuring clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, reliability, credibility, demographic support, margin of victory, and voter turnout. Data were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling to test hypothesised relationships. The study's findings show that clarity of campaign messages influenced demographic support, margin of victory, and voter turnout; emotional connections affected voter turnout and margin of victory but not demographic support; while reliability and credibility shaped voter turnout and demographic support but not margin of victory. Accordingly, strategic storytelling through clear, consistent, and emotionally engaging narratives shaped the 2019 and 2023 electoral shift in Kwara State, Nigeria, by providing direction for campaign strategists in emerging democracies.

Keywords: Storytelling, Political Marketing, Electoral Behaviour, Voter Turnout, Campaign Messaging

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Introduction

The persistence of political dynasties remains a defining feature of many developing democracies, particularly within the African political landscape (Ofosu Asante & Nartey, 2025). In Nigeria, entrenched political structures often reflect prolonged hegemonic control, where dominant families or networks shape electoral outcomes and limit competitive pluralism (Hiqmah, et al., 2025). A notable example is Kwara State, where the Saraki political dynasty exercised significant influence over electoral politics for decades. The dominance established by Dr. Olusola Saraki created a system rooted in patronage, loyalty, and political inheritance, shaping voter alignment and constraining opposition viability (Saka, 2023). However, the death of Olusola Saraki marked a turning point in the political consciousness of the electorate. Over time, public resentment intensified, fuelled by perceptions of corruption, authoritarianism, and neglect of citizens' welfare. These perceptions gradually eroded the loyalty that had sustained the dynasty. Consequently, many residents began to call for systemic change, culminating in widespread support for the All Progressives Congress (APC) during the 2019 and 2023 general elections. The APC positioned itself as a credible alternative to the People's Democratic Party (PDP), leveraging public dissatisfaction and a desire for political renewal through the "Otoge (meaning, enough is enough)" movement (Adebiyi, 2022). This represented the political tsunami that swept away the long-dominant Saraki dynasty in Kwara State in 2019 and paved the way for Governor AbdulRahman AbdulRazaq to take office.

The 2019 and 2023 elections represented a significant political shift in Kwara State, often described as a "political revolution" symbolized by the slogan "Otoge (meaning, enough is enough)" (Okyere, 2025). This slogan encapsulated collective frustration and functioned as a powerful narrative device that mobilized voters against the existing political order. The election outcome reflected not only a rejection of entrenched political dominance but also a reconfiguration of voter alignment driven by emotionally resonant campaign messaging (Bigi et al., 2016). Despite this transition of power, the anticipated economic and political benefits of the new administration did not materialize as expected, and public optimism gradually gave way to disillusionment. Within six months, many citizens began to express dissatisfaction with governance outcomes, highlighting a growing disconnect between campaign promises and policy implementation (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017). This divergence underscores a broader issue in political communication: the gap between persuasive campaign narratives and actual governance outcomes.

Within this context, storytelling has emerged in the literature as a central mechanism through which political actors structure and communicate campaign messages (Kent, 2015; Tassinari et al., 2017). Storytelling refers to the strategic use of narratives to convey political ideas, evoke emotions, and shape voter perceptions in a coherent and relatable manner (Cameron, 2012; Tsai, 2020). Importantly, storytelling is not a singular construct but comprises specific attributes through which it operates. In this study, storytelling is conceptualised through three key dimensions: clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, and reliability/credibility of campaign messages. Clarity reflects the extent to which political messages are simple, consistent, and easily understood; emotional connection captures the ability of narratives to

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evoke affective engagement; while reliability/credibility reflects the perceived trustworthiness and believability of campaign communication (Van Spanje et al., 2013; Dean et al., 2015; Kim & Cappella, 2019). These attributes collectively represent the operational mechanisms through which storytelling influences voter behaviour.

Political actors deploy these storytelling attributes to influence voter perceptions and behaviour (Gooch, 2018). However, the effectiveness of such strategies is often mediated by political culture and socio-economic realities (Ita & Edet, 2018). In many African contexts, widespread economic deprivation has been shown to shape political behaviour by increasing susceptibility to material incentives and emotional appeals (Prince et al., 2023; Von Fintel & Ott, 2017). Consequently, electoral choices may not always follow policy-based reasoning but are frequently influenced by identity, social networks, and narrative persuasion (Kim & Kim, 2021). This reinforces the importance of storytelling as a mechanism for structuring political meaning and mobilizing voters. In Nigeria, political campaign communication is often characterised by slogans, symbols, and emotive appeals rather than detailed policy discourse (Anderson & Wolton, 2020). The APC's use of "Otoge" in Kwara State in 2019 exemplifies how a clear and emotionally resonant narrative can unify diverse voter groups under a shared interpretation of political reality. Scholars argue that such slogans function as persuasive instruments that translate complex political issues into accessible narratives that resonate with collective emotions (Aluko, 2023; Hiqmah, et al., 2025). Empirical evidence further suggests that media platforms such as radio and social media contributed significantly to political awareness and narrative diffusion prior to the 2019 elections (Hassan et al., 2023). In addition, governance-related challenges such as delayed salary payments have been empirically linked to voter dissatisfaction and political behaviour (Nanthagopan & Vivek, 2021). These findings suggest that storytelling operates within broader socio-political conditions that shape its effectiveness.

While storytelling has been widely discussed, there remains limited empirical understanding of how its specific attributes influence electoral outcomes (Mochla et al., 2025). In this study, electoral outcomes are conceptualised as a multidimensional construct comprising demographic support, margin of victory, and voter turnout. Demographic support refers to the extent to which different social groups align with a political candidate or party; margin of victory reflects the degree of electoral advantage achieved; and voter turnout captures the level of citizen participation in the electoral process. These dimensions collectively provide a comprehensive representation of electoral performance and serve as the dependent variables in this study. Electoral data provides preliminary support for the role of narrative-based political strategies. In the 2015 elections, the APC secured 295,832 votes (70.50%), while the PDP received 115,220 votes (27.46%). By 2019, the APC's vote share increased to 331,546 (73.12%), while the PDP's share slightly declined to 114,754 (25.31%) (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2020). Although these shifts have been associated with broader political and institutional factors, they also suggest the potential influence of narrative-based political marketing strategies in shaping voter preferences (Harrison et al., 2023). Based on the foregoing discussion, the study addresses the following research questions:

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i. Did clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, and reliability/credibility of campaign messages influence demographic support in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria?
ii. What was the effect of clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, and reliability/credibility of campaign messages on the margin of victory in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria?
iii. How did clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, and reliability/credibility of campaign messages impact voter turnout in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria?

By answering these research questions, this study is justified on both theoretical and practical grounds. Theoretically, it contributes to political marketing literature by empirically examining how storytelling attributes function as strategic communication tools that shape measurable electoral outcomes. Practically, the study aligns with the scope of business and marketing scholarship by positioning political campaigns as forms of strategic marketing, where voters are treated as consumers and political narratives function as branding and persuasion mechanisms. In this regard, the study extends marketing theory into the political domain, offering insights into how communication strategies influence consumer-like decision-making processes in electoral contexts. This makes the study relevant to a business journal audience concerned with marketing strategy, consumer behaviour, and communication effectiveness.

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarification

Storytelling Attributes

Storytelling has emerged as a central construct within political marketing, reflecting the broader integration of marketing principles into electoral processes (Kent, 2015). Political actors increasingly adopt strategic communication techniques to position themselves and their parties as appealing "products," while voters are treated as discerning "consumers" whose support must be earned. Within this framework, storytelling represents a structured narrative mechanism through which political messages are communicated, interpreted, and internalised by voters (Tassinari et al., 2017). Conceptually, storytelling in political marketing is not a singular construct but a multidimensional communication strategy, composed of specific attributes that determine its effectiveness. These attributes include clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, and reliability (credibility) of campaign messages, which together shape how narratives are constructed and received. At its core, storytelling enables political actors to convey emotions, experiences, and ideological viewpoints in a structured and relatable manner (Cameron, 2012). Stories simplify complex political ideas, making them more accessible and meaningful to audiences, thereby enhancing comprehension and engagement (Tsai, 2020; Roxo, 2020). From a marketing perspective, storytelling is recognized as a persuasive tool that embeds messages within narratives to influence audience attitudes and behaviours (Shavitt & Barnes, 2020). These narratives often incorporate symbolic elements such as slogans, imagery, and emotionally charged language, which collectively enhance audience identification and engagement. Consequently,

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storytelling operates as a higher-order construct whose effectiveness depends on the quality and interaction of its underlying attributes: clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, and reliability (credibility) of campaign messages.

Emotional connection represents a key dimension of storytelling, reflecting the extent to which narratives evoke affective responses that engage audiences psychologically (Dean et al., 2015). Storytelling achieves influence by stimulating emotions such as empathy, excitement, or identification, which deepen audience involvement and enhance message retention (Hong et al., 2022). This emotional resonance is critical because it reflects the degree to which individuals are cognitively and affectively engaged with a focal entity, whether a brand or a political actor. Narratives that evoke strong emotions can blur the boundaries between objective information and subjective interpretation, thereby increasing persuasive effectiveness. Emotional engagement is not limited to immediate reactions but encompasses cognitive (beliefs), affective (feelings), and conative (behavioural intentions) components (Sim & Plewa, 2019). Furthermore, emotional connection is reinforced through repeated interactions and co-creative experiences, resulting in sustained psychological engagement beyond single exposures (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019). As such, emotional connection functions as a core mechanism through which storytelling enhances audience involvement and influence.

Clarity of campaign messages constitutes another critical dimension of storytelling, referring to the extent to which political messages are communicated in a simple, consistent, and easily understandable manner (Van Spanje et al., 2013). Clear messaging reduces cognitive effort, enabling audiences to process information more effectively and align political messages with their personal beliefs and interests. Theoretically, clarity enhances persuasion through central-route processing, where individuals engage with well-structured and comprehensible arguments (Strömbäck, 2007). This improves the quality of information evaluation and reduces reliance on peripheral cues (Bischof & Senninger, 2018). In communication contexts characterised by high information exposure, clarity becomes particularly important in facilitating understanding and strengthening engagement (Dupont et al., 2019). Thus, clarity represents a fundamental attribute of storytelling that determines how effectively narratives are interpreted and retained by audiences.

Reliability, often conceptualised as credibility, represents the degree to which campaign messages are perceived as truthful, consistent, and trustworthy (Kim & Cappella, 2019). Within the broader framework of persuasive communication, message effectiveness is strongly influenced by the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the source. Reliable storytelling reduces uncertainty and enhances audience confidence in the communicated message, thereby strengthening attitudes and behavioural intentions (O'Shaughnessy, 2001; Van Zuydam & Hendriks, 2018). Conversely, inconsistencies or questionable claims can undermine trust and weaken the persuasive impact of narratives (Wintersieck et al., 2021). As such, reliability functions as a critical dimension of storytelling that shapes how audiences evaluate and respond to political communication.

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Electoral Outcomes

Electoral outcomes represent the dependent construct in political marketing, reflecting the measurable consequences of campaign strategies and communication efforts (Anderson & Wolton, 2020). Within the context of political campaigns, electoral success is not a unidimensional phenomenon but rather a multifaceted construct shaped by varying forms of voter response. Accordingly, electoral outcomes are conceptualised in this study as comprising demographic support, margin of victory, and voter turnout, which collectively provide a comprehensive assessment of campaign effectiveness (Kim & Kim, 2021). This multidimensional conceptualisation is important because political campaigns do not only aim to win elections but also seek to influence the distribution, intensity, and participation patterns of voter support. As such, electoral outcomes capture both attitudinal and behavioural dimensions of political engagement, reflecting how campaign strategies translate into observable electoral performance.

Demographic support refers to the extent to which a political campaign successfully resonates with and attracts support from diverse segments of the electorate, including differences in age, gender, income, education, and socio-cultural background. It reflects the breadth and inclusiveness of voter alignment, indicating how widely a political message is accepted across heterogeneous groups (Apospori et al., 2010). Conceptually, demographic support captures the distributional dimension of electoral success, as campaigns may appeal strongly to certain groups while failing to connect with others. A campaign that achieves broad demographic support is more likely to build a stable and sustainable voter base, whereas narrow support may limit electoral competitiveness. Thus, demographic support serves as a key indicator of how effectively political communication transcends social divisions and reaches diverse constituencies.

Margin of victory represents the quantitative difference in electoral performance between competing candidates or political parties. It reflects the degree of competitive advantage achieved in an election and provides insight into the strength and decisiveness of voter preference (Howell & Justwan, 2013). Unlike demographic support, which captures the breadth of appeal, margin of victory reflects the intensity of electoral dominance. A larger margin indicates stronger persuasion, consolidation of voter support, and potential shifts in voter preferences, including the ability to attract undecided voters or convert opposition supporters. Conversely, a narrow margin may suggest fragmented support or limited differentiation between competing political alternatives. Therefore, margin of victory serves as a critical indicator of how effectively campaign strategies translate into electoral competitiveness.

Voter turnout refers to the proportion of eligible voters who participate in an election and represents a fundamental behavioural outcome in political processes (Wintersieck et al., 2021). It reflects the level of political engagement, mobilisation, and participation within an electorate. Conceptually, voter turnout captures the activation dimension of electoral outcomes, as it indicates the extent to which individuals are motivated to take action and engage in the voting process. High turnout levels suggest effective mobilisation and heightened political involvement, whereas low turnout may indicate disengagement, apathy, or dissatisfaction. In political marketing, voter turnout is particularly important because it reflects not only support for

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a candidate but also the success of campaign strategies in converting attitudes into actual behaviour.

Theoretical Review

Schema Theory

While originally introduced by Bartlett (1932), schema theory proposes that individuals organise information into mental frameworks known as 'schemas', which enable efficient encoding, storage, and retrieval of knowledge. When a narrative aligns with pre-existing schemas, individuals are more likely to achieve enhanced comprehension and retention, often accompanied by stronger emotional engagement (Kuklinski et al., 1991). For instance, a political message grounded in a voter's personal experiences can generate a powerful emotional response by activating familiar cognitive structures (Elsahn & Benson-Rea, 2018). Conversely, narratives that challenge existing schemas can also leave lasting impressions by stimulating curiosity and emotional involvement. In the context of political marketing, schema theory explains how strategically crafted storytelling that resonates with voters' cognitive frameworks can strengthen emotional appeal and deepen the perceived connection between the electorate and political candidates (Hunzaker & Valentino, 2019). Yet, the theory is criticized for its assumption that individuals interpret information through stable cognitive structures, often overlooking how new or conflicting information can reshape or override existing schemas. By applying schema theory to explain how voters' existing cognitive frameworks shape their interpretation of political narratives, the study empirically demonstrates that schema-consistent narratives enhance voter engagement and behavioural responses in the context of political marketing.

Narrative Transportation Theory

In alignment with the framework of Green and Brock (2000), narrative transportation theory suggests that when individuals are emotionally and cognitively engaged in a story, they become deeply involved and immersed within it. Individuals feel captivated and mentally carried away when they enter a narrative, as explained by the narrative transportation hypothesis (Thomas & Grigsby, 2024). When voters encounter a compelling story, they are likely to be transported into that narrative environment, where emotions are activated, and their real world beliefs can be shaped. Such immersion builds a connection between the voter and the political party or candidate, as the narrative stimulates empathy. Within political marketing, candidates who present consistent and credible stories are likely to influence voters, appealing to their emotions to secure their support (Van Laer et al., 2014). This theory is relevant to this research, as it indicates storytelling in political marketing strengthens emotional engagement by encouraging voters to relate to campaign stories and slogans. Despite the usefulness of its assumption, the limitation of narrative transportation theory lies in assuming that audiences become deeply immersed in stories, but does not fully account for individual differences such as prior beliefs or skepticism that may reduce persuasion. The linkage of a voter's narrative immersion to electoral outcomes empirically tests how the behavioural implications of narrative transportation translate into measurable electoral behaviour by contributing to a more outcome-oriented understanding of narrative persuasion in political contexts.

Framing Theory

As proposed by Erving Goffman (1974), framing theory explains how individuals

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interpret political messages by viewing frames as mental structures used to shape and organise experience. People can locate, observe, interpret, and categorise events through these frames, enabling them to understand complex social realities, while later scholars extended its application within media and political communication (Chang et al., 2002). Entman (1993) argues that framing involves selecting aspects of reality and highlighting them in communication to promote specific problem definitions, causal explanations, moral evaluations, and policy solutions. In political marketing, framing guides voters' interpretations by shaping how storytelling attributes influence judgments and evaluation of electoral choices (Borah, 2011) and ultimately affects how narratives persuade audiences and determine voting behaviour across different electoral contexts and campaign environments through strategic message design and delivery. Framing theory is limited because it focuses on how messages are presented, but often neglects the role of audience interpretation and external factors that may influence how frames are received or resisted. This study adopts framing theory, as it explains how persuasive slogans and narratives can lead voters to strongly support a political movement without critically questioning its intentions and thereby demonstrating the power of strategic messaging in shaping perceptions, mobilising support, and influencing electoral outcomes decisively.

Hypotheses Development

Previous studies provide important insights into the role of political marketing and communication strategies in shaping electoral outcomes, particularly within emerging democratic contexts. Hinson and Tweneboah-Koduah (2010), in their study of the 2008 Ghanaian presidential election, examined the role of political marketing in shaping electoral outcomes. Using a qualitative approach grounded in Butler and Collins' (1994) political marketing framework, the study found that multiple dimensions of political marketing (e.g., product, process, organisational, and market factors) jointly influenced electoral performance. Product-related elements, which include how political messages and candidate positioning are presented to voters, emerged as the most influential in determining electoral outcomes. This finding underscores the importance of strategic message construction and communication, suggesting that how political narratives are framed and delivered plays a critical role in shaping voter perceptions and electoral success (O'Shaughnessy, 2001; Strömbäck, 2007). Risma and Rahmawati (2021) explored the effectiveness of political marketing strategies in the context of the 2019 provincial legislative elections in Central Java. Their findings indicate that the successful application of targeted communication strategies significantly enhanced voter participation and electoral success. In particular, the use of push and pull marketing strategies enabled the candidate to effectively engage voters and secure electoral victory. However, the study also highlights limitations in communication strategy, especially the underutilization of social media platforms, suggesting that the effectiveness of political marketing is contingent upon the appropriateness, reach, and execution of communication strategies (Risma & Rahmawati, 2021; Hiqmah et al., 2025). This reinforces the argument that not just the presence of communication, but the quality and strategic deployment of messaging, determines electoral outcomes.

In the Nigerian context, Nwala and Uwalaka (2022) provide further empirical support for the

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role of political communication in influencing voter behaviour. Their mixed-method study of the 2019 Nigerian presidential election demonstrates that issue-based political advertising significantly shaped voter turnout. The findings reveal that exposure to campaign messages, particularly those addressing salient socio-economic issues, influenced voter engagement and participation. Moreover, demographic variations in turnout patterns suggest that different groups respond differently to campaign messaging, highlighting the importance of tailoring communication strategies to diverse audiences. The study concludes that political parties must strategically align their campaign messages with voter concerns and expectations to effectively influence electoral behaviour (Van Spanje et al., 2013; Fossen et al., 2022; Ojekwe, 2016). Yet, clarity of campaign messages enhances the comprehensibility and accessibility of political communication, enabling voters to process information more effectively and align it with their personal beliefs (Van Spanje et al., 2013). From a theoretical perspective, clear messaging facilitates central-route processing, which strengthens cognitive evaluation and increases the likelihood of informed decision-making (Strömbäck, 2007; Bischof & Senninger, 2018). When political messages are clearly articulated, they are more likely to resonate across diverse demographic groups, thereby enhancing demographic support. Clear communication also reduces ambiguity and strengthens voter confidence, which can translate into stronger electoral preference and potentially widen the margin of victory. Clarity reduces cognitive barriers to participation, increasing the likelihood that individuals will engage in the voting process (Dupont et al., 2019; Fossen et al., 2022).

Emotional connections operate as a central mechanism through which storytelling influences voter engagement and behaviour. Narratives that evoke strong emotional responses enhance psychological involvement, increase message recall, and strengthen identification with political actors (Dean et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2022). Emotionally engaging storytelling is particularly effective in mobilising voters, as affective responses can drive behavioural action more directly than purely cognitive evaluations. Emotional connection can therefore increase voter turnout by motivating participation and strengthening commitment to political choices. Additionally, emotional narratives may shape voter perceptions and contribute to shifts in electoral preference, potentially influencing the margin of victory. However, emotional resonance may not always be uniformly distributed across all demographic groups, as differences in values and experiences may moderate its impact (Sim & Plewa, 2019; Dessart & Pitardi, 2019). Reliability (credibility) of campaign messages plays a crucial role in shaping voter trust and confidence. According to source credibility theory, the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the communicator significantly influence message acceptance and persuasion (Kim & Cappella, 2019). Reliable (credible) messages reduce uncertainty, enhance trust, and strengthen positive evaluations of political actors (O'Shaughnessy, 2001; Van Zuydam & Hendriks, 2018). This increased trust can lead to stronger demographic support, as voters are more likely to align with candidates they perceive as credible. Credibility also reinforces commitment and encourages participation, thereby positively influencing voter turnout. However, while credibility strengthens support, its direct impact on competitive electoral margins may depend on other reinforcing

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factors such as message clarity and emotional mobilisation (Wintersieck et al., 2021).

Despite their contributions, existing studies have largely examined political marketing strategies at a general level, without systematically disaggregating the specific attributes of storytelling that drive electoral outcomes. In particular, there is limited empirical integration of how key storytelling attributes (e.g., clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, and reliability (credibility)) simultaneously influence different dimensions of electoral outcomes (e.g., demographic support, margin of victory, and voter turnout). This gap suggests the need for a more structured and theory-driven examination of the relationship between storytelling attributes and electoral performance. Taken together, these empirical studies highlight three critical insights. First, the effectiveness of political marketing is closely linked to how campaign messages are constructed and communicated, rather than merely the content of those messages. Second, voter responses to political communication are multidimensional, encompassing both attitudinal alignment and behavioural participation. Third, the impact of political messaging varies across contexts and demographic groups, indicating the need for nuanced and strategically designed communication approaches. Based on the review of literatures guided by the theoretical structural model outlined in Figure 1, the following main and subgroup hypotheses were formulated:

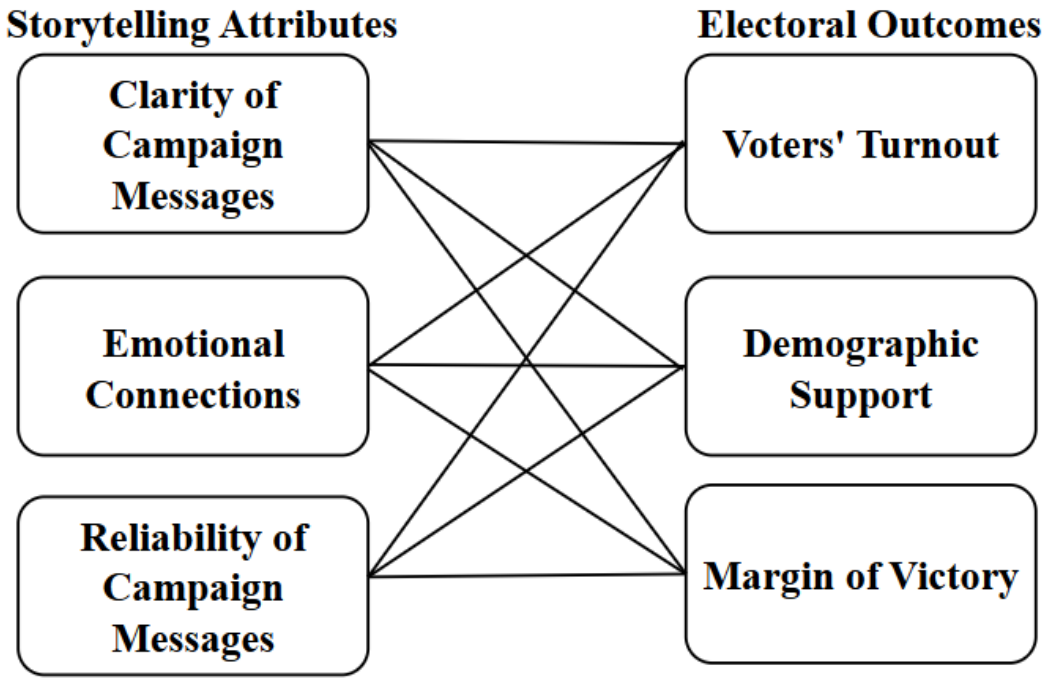


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Study. Source: Designed by Author (2025)

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H_0: Storytelling attributes has no significant effect on the electoral outcomes in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria.

H_{1a}: Clarity of campaign messages has no significant influence on voters' turnout in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria.

H_{1b}: Emotional connections have no significant influence on voters' turnout in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria.

H_{1c}: Reliability/credibility of campaign messages has no significant influence on voters' turnout in the 2019 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria.

H_{2a}: Clarity of campaign messages has no significant influence on demographic support in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria.

H_{2b}: Emotional connections have no significant influence on demographic support in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria.

H_{2c}: Reliability/credibility of campaign messages has no significant influence on demographic support in the 2019 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria.

H_{3a}: Clarity of campaign messages has no significant influence on demographic support in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria.

H_{3b}: Emotional connections have no significant influence on demographic support in the 2019 and 2023 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria.

H_{3c}: Reliability/credibility of campaign messages has no significant influence the margin of victory in the 2019 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design (Wangensteen et al., 2011) to examine the relationship between storytelling attributes and electoral outcomes in the context of the 2019 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria. A quantitative approach is appropriate for testing hypothesized relationships and assessing the predictive power of storytelling dimensions within a structured analytical framework. The cross-sectional design allows data to be collected at a single point in time, enabling evaluation of voters' perceptions and behaviours following the election period (Cardona et al., 2019). Kwara State was purposively selected due to the significant political transition observed during the 2019 elections, widely attributed to strategic campaign approaches, including storytelling in political messaging. This context provides a relevant setting for examining how storytelling attributes influence electoral outcomes. The unit of analysis is the individual registered voter, as the study focuses on how voters interpret storytelling attributes and how these interpretations relate to perceived electoral outcomes. The target population comprised registered voters who participated in the 2019 general election in Kwara State, with a total of 1,406,457 registered voters (INEC, 2020). This population reflects diverse demographic characteristics, including variations in age, gender, education, occupation, and geographic distribution. A non-probability sampling strategy was adopted due to the need for respondents with direct electoral experience and the absence of an accessible sampling frame (Hossan et al., 2023). Eligibility criteria required participants to be registered voters who actively participated in the election.

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The sample size of 384 was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for large populations even though 319 valid responses (83%) were obtained. This sample size is adequate for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), given its suitability for moderate sample sizes and complex models, and meets recommended thresholds for statistical power in behavioural research. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms (Lietz, 2010). The instrument consisted of two sections: demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, occupation) and measurement of study constructs using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). Measurement items were adapted from established literature in political communication and political marketing, with contextual adjustments. The independent variable, storytelling attributes, was operationalised through emotional connection, message clarity, and reliability (credibility). Emotional connection captured the extent to which narratives evoked feelings such as hope, empathy, and identification. Message clarity measured simplicity, consistency, and repetition of campaign messages. Reliability (credibility) assessed the perceived trustworthiness and alignment of messages with voters' experiences. The dependent variable, electoral outcomes, comprised voter turnout, demographic support, and margin of victory. The survey link was distributed via online platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Telegram groups, facilitating access to a geographically dispersed population while reducing logistical constraints. Measures to enhance data quality included restricting multiple submissions. Data collection spanned four weeks.

Data analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM with Smart-PLS software (Ali et al., 2018). This method was selected due to its predictive orientation, ability to handle complex models, and suitability for small to medium sample sizes. The analysis followed a two-step approach: measurement model assessment and structural model evaluation. Indicator reliability was assessed using outer loadings (≥ 0.70), while internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (≥ 0.70). Convergent validity was examined using Average Variance Extracted (AVE ≥ 0.50). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (HTMT < 0.90). Structural model evaluation involved analysing path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), and effect size (f^2). Significance testing was conducted using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples, while predictive relevance (Q^2) was assessed using the blindfolding procedure. Ethical considerations were strictly observed. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's purpose. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, and data were used solely for academic purposes. The study has some methodological limitations. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inference, while online non-probability sampling may under-represent less digitally engaged populations. Additionally, some outcome variables, particularly demographic support and margin of victory, reflect voter perceptions rather than official metrics. These limitations were mitigated through careful construct specification, robustness checks, and transparent interpretation of findings.

In order to reduce and evaluate the risk of common method bias, a number of procedures and statistical protection measures were introduced. Procedurally, the respondents were

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guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, and the questionnaire was designed in such a manner that there were items that represented a different construct. The Harman single-factor test was conducted statistically through unrotated principal-component factor on all the items; the significance of the first factor amounted to 26.0% of the total, which is much lower than the 50% mark, which is indicative of problematic CMB (Podsakoff et al., 2003). A complete evaluation of collinearity was done in the framework of PLS-SEM, according to Kock (2015), and all the full collinearity VIFs could be lower than 3.3. The combined results in this study are indicative of the fact that common method bias is not a material factor in the data or the relationship under study. The statistics of skewness and kurtosis were used to determine normality. The skew values were in the interval of −0.332 to −1.097, whereas the kurtosis values were at 1.236 and 3.447, which can be observed to have a slight violation of normalcy as applied to Likert-scaled data. All the values were within the suggested referring values. Notably, PLS-SEM does not have distributional normality requirements since it is based on a measure of estimation by variance (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The sample size of 319 was considered as acceptable, and it did not limit the estimation and inference of the models.

Result

Demographic Profile

This study's data comprised of 319 registered voters in the state of Kwara who had made the 2019 general elections. The representatives of both sexes were male (123 (38.6)) and female (196 (61.4)), respectively. As most of the respondents, the age distribution among the respondents was composed of young adults between 18-28 years (302, 94.7%) and some between 29-39 and 40 years of age (5, 1.6%) and 40 years and above (12, 3.8%). Marital status revealed a single pattern with, 303 (95.0%) of the respondents single, 15 (4.7%) married and 1 (0.3%) divorced. The educational background was mostly at the bachelors level with 252 respondents (79.0%) having a B.Sc. degree the rest had the following educational backgrounds: OND/NCE (43, 13.5%), M.Sc. (14, 4.4%), PhD (6, 1.9%), and HND (4, 1.3%). The demographic makeup depicts that there is a large youth, single and well-educated cohort which is an indicator of the strong youth involvement, active involvement of educated people in the electoral process.

Evaluation of Measurement Model

The reflective measurement model was tested in accordance with the PLS-SEM criteria and proved that it possesses sufficient quality measurement. All indicators that were retained had indicator loadings ranging between 0.695 and 0.801 with most of them well beyond the 0.70 mark making the retained items to have satisfactory individual item reliability. Those less than 0.70 were dropped to add to AVE but the two indicators (0.695 and 0.699) were accepted as the indicators are close to the benchmark with a more substantial value of 0.4 and the indicators add to the content of construct. Internal consistency reliability was also achieved because the alpha of Cronbach, rhoa and composite reliability of all constructs were more than 0.70.

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Table 1: ***Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity***

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Clarity of Campaign Messages	0.731	0.732	0.832	0.553
Demographic Support	0.710	0.716	0.836	0.630
Emotional Connections	0.720	0.724	0.825	0.541
Margin of Victory	0.721	0.729	0.826	0.543
Reliability of Campaign Messages	0.802	0.804	0.863	0.558
Voter's Turnout	0.714	0.718	0.823	0.537

Source: Designed by Author (2025)

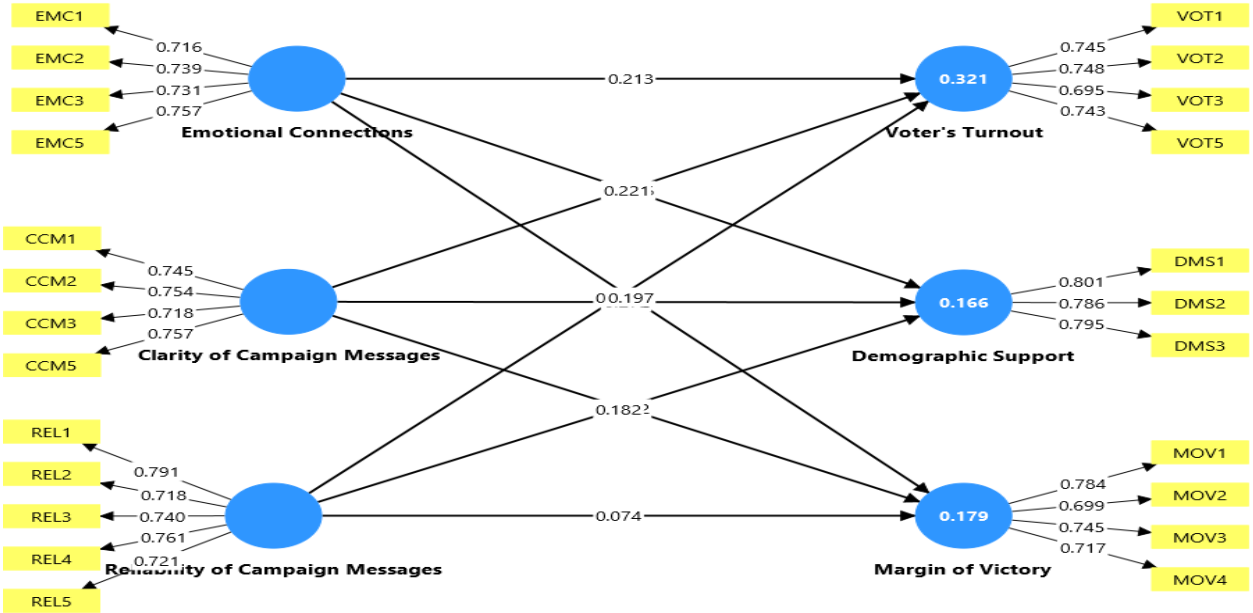


Figure 2. Measurement Model. **Source**: Designed by Author (2025)

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Table 2: ***Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) - Matrix***

	Clarity of Campaign Messages	Demographic Support	Emotional Connections	Margin of Victory	Reliability of Campaign Messages	Voter's Turnout
Clarity of Campaign Messages						
Demographic Support	0.515					
Emotional Connections	0.524	0.250				
Margin of Victory	0.501	0.462	0.433			
Reliability of Campaign Messages	0.748	0.449	0.578	0.394		
Voter's Turnout	0.630	0.520	0.561	0.635	0.637	

Source: Designed by Author (2025)

The HTMT ratio and the Fornell-Larcker criterion were used to verify discriminant validity. The HTMT values (Table 2) are all below the 0.85 cu-toff, ranging from 0.250 to 0.748. The notions are experimentally different, according to these values. The square roots of AVE on the diagonal range from 0.733 to 0.794, according to the Fornell–Larcker results (Table 3). Every square root has a higher connection with other constructions than its maximum. As a consequence, the measurement model for structural analysis is supported by the HTMT and Fornell-Larcker findings, which validate sufficient discriminant validity.

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Table 3: ***Fornell-Larcker criterion***

	Clarity of Campaign Messages	Demographic Support	Emotional Connections	Margin of Victory	Reliability of Campaign Messages	Voter's Turnout
Clarity of Campaign Messages	**0.744**					
Demographic Support	0.378	**0.794**				
Emotional Connections	0.377	0.189	**0.736**			
Margin of Victory	0.368	0.332	0.325	**0.737**		
Reliability of Campaign Messages	0.572	0.340	0.445	0.305	**0.747**	
Voter's Turnout	0.455	0.370	0.416	0.449	0.491	**0.733**

Source: Designed by Author (2025)

Assessment of the Structural Model

The structural model demonstrates acceptable collinearity, meaningful in-sample explanatory power, small effect sizes, and confirmed out-of-sample predictive relevance. Inner model VIF values range from 1.282 to 1.637, below the 3.3–5 thresholds, indicating that there are no multicollinearity concerns. In-sample R^2 values are 0.166 for Demographic Support, 0.179 for Margin of Victory, and 0.321 for Voter's Turnout, explaining 16.6%, 17.9%, and 32.1% of variance, reflecting a weak-to-moderate strength, which is suitable for electoral behaviour research. Effect sizes (f^2) are small for key paths, for instance, between Reliability and Voter's Turnout is 0.065, Clarity and Demographic Support is 0.058, with others negligible or marginal (most $p > 0.05$). Out-of-sample assessment via PLSpredict yielded positive Q^2predict values of 0.136 for Demographic Support, 0.141 for Margin of Victory, and 0.293 for Voter's Turnout, the three outcome variables, confirming predictive relevance as all are greater than zero, supported by low RMSE (0.848–0.940) and MAE (0.649–0.660) errors. The model exhibits statistically robust explanatory and predictive capabilities

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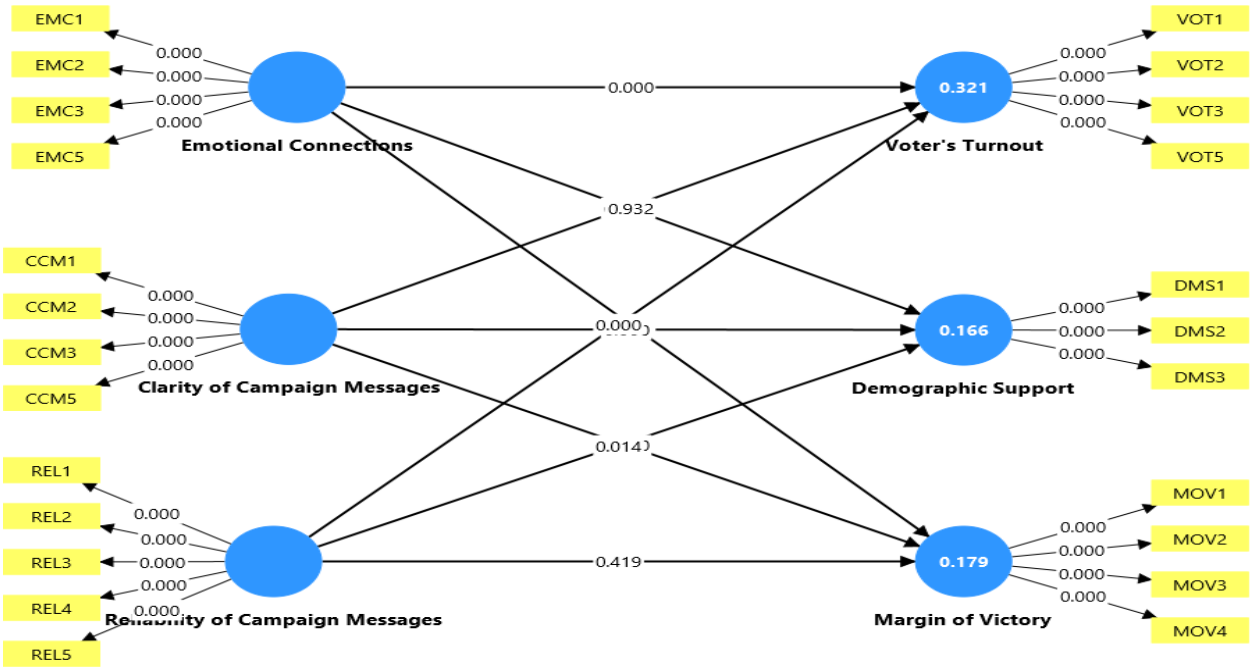


Figure 3. Structural Model. **Source**: Designed by Author (2025)

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Table 4: ***Hypothesized Relationships***

Relationships	β	Mean	STDEV	T-Values	P-values	F2	VIF
Clarity of Campaign Messages -> Demographic Support	0.272	0.275	0.075	3.625	0.000	0.058	1.529
Clarity of Campaign Messages -> Margin of Victory	0.252	0.255	0.062	4.079	0.000	0.050	1.529
Clarity of Campaign Messages -> Voter Turnout	0.221	0.222	0.063	3.482	0.001	0.047	1.529
Emotional Connections -> Demographic Support	0.006	0.010	0.067	0.086	0.932	0.000	1.282
Emotional Connections -> Margin of Victory	0.197	0.205	0.060	3.279	0.001	0.037	1.282
Emotional Connections -> Voter's Turnout	0.213	0.213	0.060	3.561	0.000	0.052	1.282
Reliability of Campaign Messages -> Demographic Support	0.182	0.184	0.074	2.461	0.014	0.024	1.637
Reliability of Campaign Messages -> Margin of Victory	0.074	0.076	0.091	0.808	0.419	0.004	1.637
Reliability of Campaign Messages -> Voter's Turnout	0.270	0.277	0.068	3.951	0.000	0.065	1.637

Source: Designed by Author (2025)

The path analysis shows that Clarity of Campaign Messages exerts a significant and positive influence on all dependent variables. It increases Demographic Support with $\beta = 0.272$, $t = 3.625$, $p < 0.001$, improves Margin of Victory with $\beta = 0.252$, $t = 4.079$, $p < 0.001$, and raises Voter's Turnout with $\beta = 0.221$, $t = 3.482$, $p = 0.001$. These results lead to a decision to reject null hypotheses of H_{1a}, H_{2a}, and H_{3a} in favour of alternative hypotheses, confirming that clarity of campaign messages is an important and consistent driver of voters' attitudes and behaviour towards election.

Emotional Connections display a selective pattern of influence on the electoral outcomes by significantly affect margin of victory with $\beta = 0.197$, $t = 3.279$, $p = 0.001$, and voter's turnout with $\beta = 0.213$, $t = 3.561$, $p < 0.001$. This lead to a decision to a decision to reject null hypotheses of H_{1b} and H_{2b} in favour of alternative

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hypotheses. However, the relationship with demographic support is weak and non-significant with $\beta = 0.006$, $t = 0.086$, $p = 0.932$, leading to a decision to accept the null hypothesis of H_{3b}. Therefore, emotional appeal mobilises voters and shapes outcome perceptions without producing uniform demographic alignment.

Reliability (credibility) significantly influence demographic support with $\beta = 0.182$, $t = 2.461$, $p = 0.014$, and voter's turnout with $\beta = 0.270$, $t = 3.951$, $p < 0.001$, leading to a decision to reject null hypotheses of H_{1c} and H_{2c} in favour of alternative hypotheses. Their effect on margin of victory is non-significant with $\beta = 0.074$, $t = 0.808$, $p = 0.419$, resulting in a decision not to reject null hypothesis of H_{3b}. Therefore, the reliability (credibility) of campaign messages strengthens support and participation, while electoral margins rely more strongly on message clarity and emotional mobilisation.

Table 5: ***R-Square, Predictive Relevance, and Prediction Error for Endogenous Variables***

Endogenous Variables	R^2	Q^2predict	RMSE	MAE
Demographic Support	0.166	0.136	0.938	0.660
Margin of Victory	0.179	0.141	0.940	0.655
Voter's Turnout	0.321	0.293	0.848	0.649

Source: Designed by Author (2025)

Discussion Of Findings

This study confirms the strong influence of strategic storytelling on electoral behaviour during the 2019 and 2023 political transition in Kwara State, aligning with broader political marketing literature that emphasizes narrative construction as a core campaign tool (O'Shaughnessy, 2001; Strömbäck, 2007). Consistent with Anderson and Wolton (2020), who demonstrate that political campaigns rely on simplified narratives to communicate complex policy realities, the findings show that voter perceptions, involvement, and evaluations were shaped more by strategic storytelling than by structural or demographic factors. In particular, the clarity of campaign messaging emerged as the strongest predictor of electoral outcomes, supporting H1, H2, and H3. This result corroborates Bischof and Senninger (2018), who argue that simpler, more accessible political messages enhance voter comprehension and engagement, and Van Spanje et al. (2013), who highlight message clarity as central to perceived campaign effectiveness. The APC's "Otoge" slogan exemplifies this dynamic by transforming diffuse dissatisfaction into a unified and actionable narrative, consistent with Framing Theory (Borah, 2011). Similar to findings by Chang et al. (2002), framing reduced cognitive complexity and redefined the election as a symbolic struggle against entrenched political dominance rather than routine party competition.

Surprisingly, emotional connection also played a decisive role in influencing voter turnout and perceived electoral momentum, leading to a decision to reject the null hypotheses of H_{1b} and H_{2b}, while demographic support remained insignificant, leading to a decision not to reject the null hypotheses of H_{3b}. This aligns with Dean et al. (2015) and Serazio (2017), who emphasize the centrality of emotional engagement in political marketing and brand

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attachment. The use of emotionally charged narratives around hardship, unpaid wages, and hope for change mirrors findings from Van Laer et al. (2014) and Thomas and Grigsby (2024), which demonstrate that narrative transportation enhances persuasion by fostering emotional immersion. Similarly, Gooch (2018) shows that partisan storytelling increases political engagement by activating affective responses. In the Kwara context, the "Otoge" narrative facilitated emotional identification across diverse voter groups, reinforcing Narrative Transportation Theory and explaining the perception of an electoral wave. However, the uneven emotional resonance across social groups also reflects Apospori et al. (2010), who note that generational and cultural differences shape how political messages are interpreted and internalized.

The findings further reveal that relatability and credibility significantly influenced voter turnout and demographic support, leading to a decision to reject the null hypotheses of H_{1c} and $H_{2c,}$ even though they did not directly affect the margin of victory, leading to a decision not to reject the null hypotheses of H_{3c}. This supports existing research emphasizing authenticity as a cornerstone of political communication effectiveness (Van Zuydam and Hendriks, 2018; Page and Duffy, 2018). The alignment between campaign narratives and lived experiences, such as unpaid salaries and visible underdevelopment, enhanced trust and mobilisation, consistent with Fossen et al. (2022), who highlight the importance of message consistency and credibility in political advertising. Likewise, Harrison et al. (2023) argue that voters are drawn to political "brands" that reflect their personal realities and values. However, the lack of significant influence on electoral margin suggests that while credibility builds support, electoral outcomes are more strongly driven by message clarity and emotional activation, reinforcing the multidimensional nature of campaign effectiveness.

The study demonstrates theoretical complementarity by integrating framing, schema, and narrative transportation theory in explaining electoral outcomes. This integration aligns with Borah (2011), who highlights framing as a mechanism for shaping meaning, and Hunzaker and Valentino (2019), who emphasize the role of schemas in organizing political understanding. The findings show that effective political storytelling operates through three interconnected mechanisms: clear framing to define the electoral contest, emotional resonance to motivate action, and credibility to sustain trust. This multi-theoretical perspective extends prior work by Kent (2015) and Cameron (2012), who argue that storytelling in political communication is most effective when it combines cognitive simplicity with emotional depth. Finally, the results contribute to the literature by clarifying the expectation–reality gap in political marketing. While campaign success was driven by emotionally compelling narratives of change, the limited emphasis on concrete policy proposals led to a mismatch between electoral promises and post-election performance. This finding is consistent with Dupont et al. (2019), who show that voters often interpret campaign messages as symbolic pledges rather than detailed commitments, and with Wintersieck et al. (2021), who highlight how message framing can shape expectations independently of policy substance. The Kwara case thus illustrates a critical tension in political marketing: narratives that are highly effective in mobilizing voters may simultaneously create conditions for post-electoral dissatisfaction when they prioritize emotional appeal over substantive policy articulation.

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The findings contribute to the existing body of literature in the field of political marketing through the fact that the variables of storytelling can be used as operationalized strategic levers with discernible electoral impact. The study is a synthesis of the narrative theory and the empirical analysis of elections, showing how an appeal to the heart affects choices in the political process in an emergent democracy, and how these appeals are framed and given credibility. The implications of the findings on the wider application of democracy in Nigeria and other similar situations are more general. Even though the mobilisation of electoral change can be achieved through the storytelling, the campaign that relies on emotive and oppositional framing should change the narrative work into real performance in the governance. The expectation among reform and service delivery was heightened when the Otoge communiqué was issued. Where governance delivery does not meet the story, the citizens lose confidence and indignation among voters increases. The 2019 Kwara election provides empirical data of the narrative effect in the competitive politicking spheres. Influential framing, emotional appeal, and plausible communication all have an effect on voter preference and the election process. Any further scholarship must evaluate the question of whether the political support created by the use of narrative strategies is sustained through a series of governance.

Conclusion And Recommendation

Conclusion

The current research examined the role of storytelling as a political marketing factor in the effectiveness of the All Progressives Congress in the 2019 Kwara State election. Empirical evidences relate that narrating stories served as a strategic tool. Understandability of message, emotional appeal, and apparent credibility directly and statistically impacted on voter behaviour and evaluation of the outcomes of the election. All these aspects had an overall effect on voter turnout, the demographic geographic and the extent to which one was able to win the election. The narrative design of the APC victory was based on a planned narrative design. Framing theory explains why the campaign made the contest appear as a struggle against the deeply rooted dynastic control; the story of Otoge election made the election process appear as a mobilization of masses in the fight against and to change. Emotions enhanced the involvement and mobilization, relatable complaints put the message into lived experience, which strengthens the credibility. Overall, the unification of those mechanisms explains the extent of electoral change recorded in 2019 and 2023 general elections.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusion of this study, several recommendations are offered by this study. Message clarity should be prioritised by campaign teams through the use of explicit wording and consistent communication across radio, television, and online media, ensuring that slogans are directly linked to specific policy pledges. In addition, strategists should develop emotionally driven stories grounded in shared community experiences such as employment, salary payments, and service delivery, and communicate them in major local languages to broaden reach and strengthen voter identification. Furthermore, political actors must enhance reliability and credibility by employing evidence-based statements, clear policy positions, and consistent messaging across all platforms. To ensure coherence, parties should institutionalise storytelling within campaign frameworks by creating structured message plans, coordinating spokesperson

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communication, and using audience feedback to refine narratives. Finally, issue-oriented campaign communication that emphasises good governance, fiscal responsibility, and accountability should be promoted by electoral regulators and civil society organisations to strengthen democratic consolidation.

Limitation and Future Research Agenda

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that provide important directions for future research. First, the use of a cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between storytelling attributes and electoral outcomes. While the findings identify significant associations, they do not capture how these relationships evolve over time. Future research should adopt longitudinal or panel designs to examine how storytelling influences voter perceptions and behaviour across different stages of the electoral cycle, including pre-election, election, and post-election periods. Second, the study employed a non-probability sampling approach using online survey distribution, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Although this method was appropriate for accessing respondents with direct electoral experience, it may under-represent segments of the population with limited internet access, particularly older or rural voters. Future studies should consider probability-based sampling techniques or mixed-mode data collection methods (e.g., combining online and face-to-face surveys) to enhance representativeness and external validity. Third, the measurement of key outcome variables, particularly demographic support and margin of victory, relied on voter perceptions rather than objective electoral data. While perceptual measures are valuable for understanding how individuals interpret electoral dynamics, they may not fully reflect actual voting patterns. Future research should integrate survey data with secondary electoral data, such as official voting records, to provide a more robust and triangulated assessment of electoral outcomes.

Fourth, this study conceptualised storytelling through three key attributes: clarity of campaign messages, emotional connections, and reliability (credibility). While these dimensions capture core aspects of political storytelling, they do not exhaust all possible narrative elements. Future research could extend this framework by incorporating additional dimensions such as narrative consistency, authenticity, symbolic communication, and digital storytelling strategies, particularly in the context of social media-driven campaigns. Fifth, the study is context-specific, focusing on the 2019 general elections in Kwara State, Nigeria. While this provides rich contextual insight, the findings may be influenced by unique socio-political dynamics associated with that election. Future research should replicate this study across different geopolitical contexts, electoral systems, and levels of political competition to assess the generalisability of the findings and identify context-specific versus universal patterns. Finally, the study does not explicitly examine potential moderating variables that may influence the relationship between storytelling and electoral outcomes, such as political awareness, media exposure, or socio-economic status. Future studies should incorporate moderating and mediating variables to develop a more nuanced understanding of how and under what conditions storytelling influences voter behaviour.

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