

## VOTERS' USES and GRATIFICATIONS of MASS MEDIA in ANGLOPHONE CAMEROON

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### Abstract:

Much has been written about how the mass media influences voters' choices during elections, but few researchers pay attention to what voters' do with the media during election campaigns. This study sought to understand voters' uses and gratifications of the mass media in Anglophone Cameroon. The chief objective of this research was to further our understanding of how voters' make use of the mass media during periods of campaign as they seek different gratifications and whether or not the mass media shaped their final voting decision. Using a qualitative methodological lens through focus group interviews led to the emergence of four themes: (1) lack of trust in the media, (2) minimal effect of media in shaping voting decision, (3) discrimination in media use, (4) derived gratifications. Our themes resonate with the current literature in the field of political communication and advance our understanding of voters' uses and gratifications of the mass media in the English speaking regions of Cameroon.

**Keywords:** *Voters, Uses and Gratification, Mass media, Anglophone Cameroon*

### 1.1 Introduction

Elections are considered to be the primary and important part of democracy. The elections in democracies demand that the public should have an opportunity to choose the representatives and parties according to their free will (Taylor, 1992). Elections are the central instrument for the exercise of the sovereignty of the nation and they can be seen as the quality measurement of the society.

According to Dahl (1989), the credibility and legitimacy of democratic elections can be questioned if the voters are not in a position to take informed decisions to make political choices. So it can be asserted that the quality of

decision making in a democratic set up is largely dependent on and closely linked to the quality of information provided by the mass media to the voters. Media in a democratic set up are acknowledged as important factors as they play a major role in establishing and strengthening accountability and sustainability of the governments. The media play a significant role in this process and the forum provided by them during the electoral campaigns becomes an important platform to present political ideologies by different political parties (Ward, 2004). Similarly, the media provides an opportunity to the voters to get political information and to analyse the programs and manifestoes presented and propagated by

different political parties and candidates during the election campaigns.

A prime concern of media coverage of elections is the right of voters to full and truthful information, and their rights to participate in debates and dialogue on policy matters with politicians. Inherent to this task is the entitlement of parties and candidates to use the media as a platform for interaction with the public. Furthermore, the Election Management Body in Cameroon (ELECAM) has the duty to communicate information to the electorate – and to a variety of other groups, including the political parties and candidates. The media themselves have a right to report freely and to scrutinize the whole electoral process. This scrutiny is in itself a vital safeguard against interference or corruption in the management or conduct of the electoral process.

In every democratic process especially in emerging democracies, the media increasingly plays a preponderant role in fostering the democratic process through media coverage and framing of stories, opinion and personalities (Tanjong,2012).The media play an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy. Discussion of the media's functions within electoral contexts often focuses on their "watchdog" role. By unfettered scrutiny and discussion of the successes and failures of candidates, governments, and election management bodies, the media can inform the public of how effectively they have performed and help to hold them to account. Yet the media also have other roles in enabling full public participation in elections such as organizing media debates.

The mass media played a significant role in the February 9, 2020 twin elections in Cameroon and other recently held elections notably the presidential election of 2018. ELECAM educated voters through the media, particularly video material and television programs and adverts. The national television (CRTV) aired specific

slots dedicated to campaigns. Private television stations increasingly carried political messages relating to the campaign. Political parties were offered access to free air time on private televisions as advertisers recognized the audience potential of political related broadcasting.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Without doubt, the use of the mass media in making final political decisions as to which political party or candidate to vote for is widespread among voters and shows no sign of abating. There is ample research that shows from empirical evidence the role that the mass media plays in shaping the final decisions of voters for example Kitchens, Powell and Williams (2009); Hendriks, Hagemann, & Snippenburg, (2004); Gunther & Mughan (2000); Graber (2001); Vivian (1991).

The media have played an important role in politics since many countries gained their independence in sub-Saharan Africa in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Voters need information to make educated decisions and they count on the mass media for their information needs. In the 2018 presidential elections in Cameroon, both public and private media gave valuable information to voters. It is the case in America as the nation looks forward to the 2020 presidential elections.

This study, therefore, looks at voter's uses and gratifications of mass media in Anglophone Cameroon: to identify voters' habits and reasons for using the media during political campaigns leading to an election. How does the mass media shape the final decision of voters? The problem statement may be summarised as follows:

- ❖ There is lack of political interest among voters in Anglophone Cameroon considering the high level of voter apathy.

- ❖ There exists a gap in knowledge on what voters expect from the mass media during election campaigns.
- ❖ Candidates and political strategists in Cameroon don't have a clear idea of the kinds of information sought by voters in Anglophone Cameroon.

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

Undertaking this study on voters' uses and gratifications of mass media, the researchers had the following objectives in mind:

- ❖ To find out if voters in Anglophone Cameroon discriminate in their use of the mass media.
- ❖ To find out if voters in Anglophone Cameroon have trust for the mass media.
- ❖ To find out if the mass media influences the final decision of voters in Anglophone Cameroon.

### **1.4 Research questions**

To be able to attain the objectives of this study, we shall address the following research questions:

RQ1: Do voters in Anglophone Cameroon discriminate in their use of the mass media?

RQ2: Do voters in Anglophone Cameroon have trust for the mass media?

RQ3: How does the mass media shape the final decision of voters in Anglophone Cameroon?

## **2.1 Literature Review**

### **2.1.1 Media use by voters'**

The mass media function as intermediaries between the political system and the public with media organizations and journalists producing and relaying contents to citizens thereby playing a major role in current democracies (K€ubler and

Kriesi, 2017).The mass media fulfill an important double-function in a democracy by informing the public of political processes and reflecting the public opinion for the political elites (Wettstein and B€uchel, 2017).

The press and broadcast media usually play a significant role in political communication. They, however by the nature of their functioning and role, employ different modes of intervention in politics. Politicians and political parties use different channels to get their campaign messages across to the voters. The selection of these channels is based on the requirement of the politicians while their scale of reach and efficacy vary in different cases. Gunther & Mughan (2000) assert that naturally, the press does not only have to be free but (professionally) responsible. They assign the responsibility to media to provide maximum opportunities to the voters to make informed choices and to take informed decisions. Reading the history of Cameroon, the early newspapers such as Cameroons Times and Cameroon Champion published articles which propagated the vision of particular political parties. This factor has been indicated by different studies (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Giddens, 1999) according to whom "a major issue of concern for traditional news media is its declining credibility with a public that increasingly is cynical toward institutions of all kinds and blames the media for many defects seen in governments that seem less effective and able to solve problems of general concern" Pg.18

Kitchens, Powell and Williams (2009) studied Media usage and politics identifying that media usage is both a cause and effect for political behaviour. They elucidated the cause of media usage is related to information seeking. Voters who use the media for politics seek information on political topics. They identified four major factors for information seeking: openness, education, factual knowledge and political sophistication. Moreover, Barton (2009) quoting Lasswell's identification of media uses and

gratifications explained that the main factors for media usage for gathering information are environmental surveillance, social heritage transmission and building relationship with the current social needs and events. On the other hand, Greenberg (1974), Lometti, Reeves and Bybee (1977) supported the opposite idea that the gratification sought are not usually the gratifications obtained. The two perspectives of the uses of the media for gratifying social and psychological needs defined the motivation for media exposure to satisfy the need for knowledge.

### **2.1.2 Voters' reliance on mass media**

Danaher and Rossiter (2011) identified how people have different perceptions of different media channels. They compared traditional media, television, radio and print media. Danaher and Rossiter (2011) studied how audiences benefit from different messages of different media channels. Their study was useful for campaigners to notice in order to have ideas to satisfy different needs of the audiences. Also to be able to create and target effective messages in different media channels. From another perspective, Peng and Hackley (2009) compared voters to commercial consumers. They found that there are relatively similar aspects when dealing with voters as consumers who receive messages from the media. Those messages result in forming attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. Nevertheless, the setting of the political context of communication campaigns may differ from consumption marketing campaigns (Lock & Harris, 1999). In both cases the campaigner aims at promoting the candidate as well as promoting the product, the service or the idea and building its image.

Social media is now paramount for political candidates after Senator Barack Obama's successful 2008 presidential campaign established social media as an integral part of the campaign toolbox (Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sander & Welpe, 2012). Social media was first used

during the 2011 Presidential elections in Cameroon with candidates like Edith Kah Walla and the incumbent Paul Biya making ample use of social media (Langmia, 2013). Since then, social media has been a force to reckon with and was effectively used by candidates in Cameroon's 2020 Legislative and Municipal elections.

Consequently, voters' behaviours are the indicators of how they use the media to get information and to satisfy their cognitive and affection needs. In different societies, different voters' behaviours towards the media and their reactions to the messages are different. Cwalina, Falkowski and Newman (2008) studied the different behaviors of voters. The study compared voters in Poland as a developing country of evolving democracy and voters in the United States as a well-established democratic society. The study concluded that in developing countries the emotional aspect and emotional relationship with the candidate weighs more than the cognitive calculations. However, in the stable democratic societies, it is hard to convince voters with emotional messages and even with informative messages. In democratic societies voters became more trained not to be drifted with hopes and they carefully perceive political messages as a result of voting experience. They know what to believe and what not to from media messages.

### **2.1.3 Media effect on voters'**

Media may affect the audience in a wide variety of ways (Bryant, Thompson and Finklea, 2013; Nabi and Oliver 2009; Potter 2012). Although the impact of early research remains inescapable in the area of political communication research, Rogers, (2004) noted that communication scholars may have overemphasized the minimal effects of mass media. From the 1940s to the early 1970s, media use variables were generally limited in the Michigan questionnaires to one item per medium (radio, newspapers, magazine, and television). Following from the Columbia

tradition, party identification was considered a stronger predictor of voting than media use. However, later research called into question this minimal-effects conclusion (Rogers, 2004).

Much evidence suggested that voters have become better informed and more issue-oriented over the decades (Nie, Verba, & Petrocik, 1976). Nie et al., 1976 noted that people in the United States today are less likely to say they belong to a party, and this measure is now a weaker predictor than it was a few decades ago. Campaigns are conducted today not by political parties' so much as professional campaign consultants (Rogers, 2004). In terms of media, television, which has become an important campaign information source for voters, was not widely introduced until the early 1950s (Vivian, 1991), so television was not even considered when Lazarsfeld's research was conducted. In 2001, 56% of the American public responded in surveys that television was their main source of political news, while 24% responded newspapers and 14% said radio (Graber, 2001).

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.2.1 The Uses and Gratifications theory**

The first application of the uses and gratifications model on public affairs was conducted by Blumler and McQuail (1969) in Britain. They identified eight different motivations – vote guidance seeking, reinforcement of decisions already made, surveillance of the political environment, excitement, anticipated utility in future interpersonal communication situations, alienation, partisanship, and relaxation – for use or non-use of political content of the media. The results showed the strength of motivation played different roles in mediating the impact of political communication.

Uses and Gratification theory suggests that the audience members are able to discriminate in media consumption. It focuses on what people want from and choose to do with particular

media and media content. According to the theory, the audience seeks out specific media outlets and specific contents to gratify specific needs. McQuail et al; (1972) described four basic divisions for media use which include: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity, and surveillance. In the current scenario, Uses and Gratification researchers consider different variables like needs, objectives, advantages, personal factors and the results of the usage of media content which are major determinants of media selection. Katz et al; (1974) described five basic assumptions of Uses and Gratification Theory which include: the audience is active and its media use is goal oriented; the initiative in linking need gratification to a specific medium choice rests with the audience member; the media compete with other sources for need satisfaction; people have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests, and motives to be able to provide researchers with an accurate picture of that use and the value judgment of media content can only be assessed by the audience.

### **2.2.2 Agenda-setting theory**

McCombs and Shaw first introduced the idea of agenda-setting communication research to suggest that media set the political agenda for the public. The theory postulates the salience of an issue or other topic in the mass media influences its salience among the audience (McCombs, 1981). With content analysis and survey data, they found that newspapers were the prime movers in defining the agenda of issues for Charlotte, North Carolina, voters during the 1972 presidential campaign (Shaw & McCombs, 1977). Shaw and McCombs (1977) also examined a number of contingent conditions that might enhance the news media's agenda-setting influence. They found those conditions – the psychological concept of the need for orientation, comparative roles of newspapers and television, and the fit of interpersonal communication in the mass communication process – reconfirmed the original hypothesis that media agenda influence

the public's perception of important issues (McCombs & Bell, 1996).

Evidence also has shown the influence of media agenda-setting on political behaviour (McCombs & Shaw, 1974; Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 2004). In a study of the 1990 election for governor of Texas, Roberts (1992) found a strong relationship between issue salience and actual votes. While holding demographics and media use variables constant, the reported votes for governor were correctly predicted 79% of the time by the level of issue concern over time. When one political issue had high level of salience and received more public attention, the candidate who addressed the issue in favour of the public received more votes than other candidates. Weaver (1991) similarly found that public concern about a major issue was linked with actual behaviour, such as writing a letter, attending a meeting, voting, or signing a petition.

### **2.2.3 Relation of study to theoretical framework**

An important effect based on learning from the media constitutes the agenda-setting function of mass media (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Agenda-Setting theory holds that citizens learn about the importance and social relevance of issues from mass communication. Studies repeatedly found that the more prominently an issue is discussed, the more relevant it is perceived by citizens (McCombs, 2005) or politicians (Helfer, 2016).

On a second level it has even been found that citizens learn which issues are most relevant when talking about specific political candidates from their association with these issues in the news (McCombs et al. 2000). Further, citizens may learn causes, effects and moral evaluations from the media (Entman, 1993), or specific ways of interpreting and thinking about an issue from the way it is frequently framed in the media (Scheufele, 1999). Taken together, media have the potential to teach citizens not only “what to

think about”. The news also tell potential voters how to think about it” (McCombs and Shaw 1993: 62).

### **3.1 METHODOLOGY**

The method employed in this study is the qualitative method of data collection and analysis. We conducted this research using qualitative methods because we needed a complex, detailed understanding of how voters' in Anglophone Cameroon make use of the mass media during political campaigns and what gratifications they seek from those uses before casting their votes. This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature (Creswell,2013).Data was collected using focus group discussions. **3.2 Participants**

A purposive sample of 22 voters (12 male and 10 female) split into three focus groups who registered in any previous election in Cameroon participated in this phenomenological study. Majority of our respondents had University education with at least a first degree (77.27%), High School education (9.09%) and Secondary School education (13.64%).The first focus group FG1 had a mean age of 33 years (SD=5.64), FG2 had a mean age of 26years (SD=2.27) and FG3 a mean age of 39years (SD=8.27). The overall average age was 33years (SD=7.99). The three focus groups FG1, FG2 and FG3 were made up of 8, 6 and 8 participants respectively. Inclusion criteria were (a) did register to vote in any presidential, national assembly or municipal election before (b) 22 years of age or older (c) able to communicate in English.

### **3.3 Procedures**

We obtained approval from the University of Buea and persons who met inclusion criteria were approached and asked to participate. After several weeks of negotiations many of the

participants that we approached gave verbal consent assuring us of their willingness to participate. Arrangements were made to conduct three focus group interviews in Buea and Bamenda with the participants. Two focus groups took place in Bamenda while one focus group took place in Buea. The focus group sessions were held within two weeks and took a maximum duration of one hour thirty minutes. The focus groups varied in size between six and eight voters (Hundley & Shyles, 2010). All focus group discussions were tape-recorded with the permission of the respondents and transcribed verbatim.

### 3.4 Data analysis

Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method was employed in analysing the focus group transcripts. In this method, all written transcripts were read several times to obtain an overall feeling for them. From each transcript phrases or sentences that pertain directly to the lived experience of voters' in Anglophone Cameroon were identified. Meanings were then formulated from the significant statements and phrases. The formulated meanings were later clustered into themes allowing for the emergence of themes common to all the focus group transcripts. The results were then integrated into an in-depth, exhaustive description of the phenomenon of voters' uses and gratifications of mass media.

### 3.5 Methodological Rigor

Through member checking, we solicited participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretation (Creswell, 2007). This technique is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility. In this study, selected participants were approached a second time and had the opportunity of taking back the transcripts and preliminary analysis consisting of description or themes to get their views on whether it reflected what they actually meant. No significant concerns were raised as the transcripts

and preliminary analysis were in line with what we got from the focus group discussions.

## 4 RESULTS

Several common themes emerged in the corpus with similarities and differences in the answers we received from the participants. When discussing on certain issues some focus groups overwhelmingly agreed on certain aspects such as the role the media played in shaping their final voting decision. In some instances there were few disagreements like when we talked about the effectiveness of the mass media when it comes to adequately playing its role during periods of elections. It was clear that age and maturity varied among the participants but in all the focus groups everyone could relate their experiences to the topic we discussed. Four dominant themes emerged in the data about voters' uses and gratifications of mass media in Anglophone Cameroon: (1) lack of trust in the media, (2) minimal effect of media in shaping voting decision, (3) discrimination in media use, (4) derived gratifications.

### 4.1 Theme: Lack of trust in the mass media

When asked if they trust mass media contents that are aired or written during election campaign periods, many of the respondents were very categorical in their responses and cited reasons why they don't trust especially the mainstream media. The reasons ranged from the lack of credible information from the media to the media being used especially by the government as a propaganda tool to wean voters. In a typical case an elderly woman said at times the media gives information during the campaign trail only to find out later that it was not factual. Some responses included:

*F5<sub>3</sub>: No I don't really trust them [the media].*

*F2<sub>2</sub>: No I don't trust it [the media].*

*M1<sub>3</sub>: Hmmm, definitely I don't trust it*

*F1<sub>3</sub>: I can't and I will never trust the mass media*

*M3<sub>3</sub>: Actually I don't trust the mass media*

*M5<sub>1</sub>: No I can't say I really trust the media*

*F3<sub>3</sub>: I don't really follow the elections [through the media] because I don't trust what is going on.*

One particular focus group had all eight respondents agree on the fact that they don't trust the mass media in Cameroon when it comes to reporting during election periods adding that the information they give is not usually factual.

*Researcher: Does everyone agree that the media in Cameroon doesn't give credible information.*

*Group: Yes.*

Some of the respondents intimated that they always seek to confirm the information they get. Because they don't fully have trust for the mass media in Cameroon they always try to get to other local stations to check for corroboration. They only turn to believe the story when the different media organs are all reporting it the same. Some of those who fall in this category worry that information is usually distorted during election periods reasons why they try to seek confirmation. The following excerpt was a typical response:

*M5<sub>1</sub>: Well emm I'll say for a majority of them [media reports] you need to like confirm.*

*F3<sub>2</sub>: I trust them somehow; they cannot be saying lies all the time.*

*F2<sub>2</sub>: Uhhmmmya somehow; but not 100% trust.*

*M1<sub>1</sub>: ... at times there are some contents that I trust; some I take with a pinch of salt.*

This respondent added:

*M1<sub>1</sub>: I carry out investigations before concluding.*

Another respondent had a worry that some media organs are taking sides when it comes to reporting on political issues reasons why it is

difficult for him to trust such media contents. He said:

*M3<sub>1</sub>: I have to also listen to or watch out for newspapers to see what they will be reporting so I have to really confirm to be sure that I'm accepting the right thing.*

Nevertheless a few respondents said they completely trust the media. One of the respondent said his trust for the media is as a result of the camera being used and the case of live programmes that are aired. Another said with the coming of transparency international elections are being done fair and free. Note the quotes below:

*F5<sub>2</sub>: Yes I trust what they [the media] say.*

*M2<sub>2</sub>: I trust what they say.*

#### **4.2 Theme2: Minimal effect of media in shaping Voters' final decision**

A second major theme that emerged from our study that was not surprising at all was that the mass media has a very limited effect in shaping the final decision of voters' in Anglophone Cameroon. Respondents said that the media has very little or no influence on them when it comes to voting for a candidate. Some stood their grounds that the media almost has zero influence on them while others admitted that it is possible that the media may have an indirect influence on their final voting decision. Some of them argued that the media has an influence generally but that the media could not sway them. In more extreme cases answers included:

*M5<sub>1</sub>: The media does not influence my decision.*

*F2<sub>2</sub>: It's because I don't believe in the media, that's why it cannot influence me.*

*F5<sub>3</sub>: I don't think that it [the media] influenced my final voting decision.*

*F2<sub>3</sub>: I have the same view.*



*M3<sub>2</sub>: Actually it did not influence my voting decision.*

*F3<sub>2</sub>: No for me the media did not influence my final [voting] decision. If I have a particular candidate in mind the media will not influence my decision. There is nothing they can do in the media that will move me. I will stick and vote the candidate I have always had in mind.*

*F3<sub>2</sub>: The media cannot influence my decision because all what the media says....they are just beating around the bush we already know who will win so they cannot do anything to change my decision.*

*M2<sub>2</sub>: The media is not powerful to change my decision because all that they will be saying is what I've been hearing.*

*F1<sub>1</sub>: The media does not really you know influence my decision on which party to vote for.....you put many things together before you decide to vote for a particular party; you don't listen to what they say you should find out information about them before you get to vote for....*

A 44 year old female said she remains loyal to her political party and no injury time debates can sway her:

*F4<sub>3</sub>: But as long as I belong to a party and I know what the party is capable of doing and I believe in the objectives of the party, why should I allow late or last minute debates to move me.*

Another wave of our respondents thought the media had an indirect influence on the final decision they took. They were hesitant to admit that the media could influence them directly. Some of such responses include:

*M3<sub>1</sub>: There is always a way that the media influences us either directly or indirectly but I think that generally for the media to influence me directly is difficult.*

*M4<sub>1</sub>: The media has an indirect effect on me, it influences me indirectly.*

*M1<sub>2</sub>: With respect to my own opinion, let's say within the few weeks of that election what is being shown over that period of time [in the media], that particular moment does very little to like influence my decision.*

*F1<sub>2</sub>: At times it used to influence me. Ya maybe I may like somebody, and the media might reveal maybe some negative part concerning that person I may just say ok well let me try this other person.*

*M2<sub>1</sub>: Well for the moment very very little, maybe in the future but it depends on who is professing what on the media.*

In a few instances participants admitted that accumulated wave of media reports could influence their decisions. For example two respondents said:

*M1<sub>2</sub>: I can't just listen to an individual within the election fever period let's say over a month or two and it influence my decision.*

*M1<sub>1</sub>: It [mass media] may influence me in a long term but not a short term process.*

Some of our respondents acknowledged that although the mass media did not or cannot sway them to vote for a candidate they did not have in mind initially the media actually spurs them to vote for their preferred candidate. In another sense they are activated and reinforced by the mass media.

*M3<sub>3</sub>: Actually what happened is when I get the information, it actually spurs me up to get more reasons to support the main party I consider my party.*

Researcher: How does the mass media shape your final voting decision; are you reinforced or swayed?

*F1<sub>3</sub>: I'm reinforced, not swayed.*

*F4<sub>3</sub>: I'm reinforced, I'm not swayed.*

Irrespective of the many claims that the mass media does not have an influence on the final decision taken by voters', a handful of respondents said the media had a direct influence

on their final voting decision as evidenced by the following quote.

M4<sub>1</sub>: The media very strongly influences my political decisions. I remember my first presidential election I registered in 2011; I followed the media for like the two weeks of campaign and finally on voting day I didn't vote. I actually went to the polls and I was unable to make a decision because I had critically waited for somebody to sway me and say something that will move me.....none of them [presidential candidates] influenced me and so I actually went back home with all my voting cards and so I think that very strongly the media really influences my opinion of voting.

### 4.3 Theme 3: Discrimination in media use

Another major theme that emerged from our study was discrimination in the use of the mass media among voters' in Anglophone Cameroon. The participants had preferences in the programmes they followed over the media and they also discriminated among the different mediums. Interestingly although some of the participants criticised the CRTV for being biased, they turn to rely on it.

M2<sub>2</sub>: I rely heavily on CRTV.

M4<sub>1</sub>: CRTV is my most credible media organ in Cameroon.

F4<sub>3</sub>: Yea, principally CRTV and political programmes aired on TV and radio [programmes] that runs on Thursday and Friday.

F1<sub>1</sub>: I think that when it comes to information during campaigns periods I like watching the CRTV even though they give time to the party in power.

This respondent said he relies on the CRTV but only because other stations are stifled by the government and not permitted to be critical.

M1<sub>3</sub>: Definitely the CRTV because if you look over the years, CRTV during election period, some other media houses are not given the go ahead to talk about certain things when it comes to politics. So if you don't rely on CRTV, which one will you rely again on?

Despite this, some respondents were very critical of the CRTV stating that they are biased which leaves them with no alternative to follow the private stations or international stations. Note the following quotes:

M1<sub>2</sub>: I for one I rarely watch the CRTV except occasionally; I will prefer watching may be CNN, BBC, Aljazeera maybe get news internationally round the world rather than looking at our local news like the other person just talked of.

F1<sub>3</sub>: Our own media the CRTV is failing us, we can always want to be currently informed about what is happening and so we tune to stations like BBC.

M1<sub>3</sub>: Our main station the CRTV most at times is always talking about the ruling party CPDM.

Some of our respondents said they preferred the private media which to them is more objective. For instance:

F1<sub>1</sub>: I like a media house like STV and Canal 2 because they give equal opportunity to all the contestants.

M2<sub>1</sub>: Yes I share the same view; I think I rely on some radio stations and TV stations more than the others like Equinoxe and Canal 2.

M1<sub>3</sub>: I follow newspapers like The Post, Eden, and Vision Afrique to get different information and know what is happening to maybe in what I believe in during that period.

Another interesting finding that emerged was the love the respondents have for TV. The respondents mostly classified TV, radio, newspaper and internet according to their order of preference. For instance some respondents explained:

M1<sub>1</sub>: Well for me I classify the TV to be the very first; because I'm always there I can't spend a day without watching the news to get information concerning the country.

M1<sub>1</sub>: .....it may be good for the eye so the TV takes the lead.

M3<sub>3</sub>: TV is first for me, then the internet, the radio comes in mostly during the weekend.....

*when I'm not home throughout the day, when I come back I watch TV and get other information from the internet. But not much is gotten from the internet in Cameroon.*

*M5<sub>1</sub>: The TV first, the radio second and the internet before newspaper.*

*M1<sub>3</sub>: The TV; how could you believe in something you don't see.*

*M2<sub>1</sub>: I will go for TV first then radio then newspaper.*

In describing the use of mass media during election period the study finds that time spent watching TV often supplants time spent with radio, newspaper and the internet. Of course a few answers ran contrary to this finding:

*F1<sub>3</sub>: I prefer the radio first then the TV because the radio gives detail information about what you actually want to know.*

*F5<sub>3</sub>: Yes, I also prefer the radio.*

Notwithstanding few respondents had newspapers and the internet as their preferred medium; two respondents stated:

*F4<sub>2</sub>: I first consider the newspapers, after newspapers radio and after radio television. Internet is last because we do not have internet everywhere.*

*F2<sub>2</sub>: Internet, TV, radio and newspaper.*

In using the mass media during periods of election campaigns, some respondents disclosed that they don't actively seek information but rather make do with the information that reach them as evidenced by the following quotes:

*F1<sub>1</sub>: Well if I say that I really go tune to radio stations to listen to information on rallies and things like that I'm lying. I think I just make do the opportunity if I get to listen to it.*

*F3<sub>2</sub>: Let me be honest I don't tune to it [the mass media]*

#### 4.4 Theme 4: Achieved Gratifications

A fourth major theme emerging from the data was achieved gratifications after following their preferred programmes. Respondents said when they took time to listen and watch especially their preferred programmes they obtained satisfactions. This theme emerged only thanks to programmes the respondents considered good enough to give them satisfactions. One respondent explained:

*M1<sub>1</sub>: Yes at times I'm very satisfied especially when it comes to a very topical issue when I have a poor mastery of it.*

*Researcher: Are you usually satisfied.*

*M3<sub>2</sub>: Yes. Most of my preferred programmes you know the time I spend listening to them or watching them is worthy, ya. So I generally have a sense of satisfaction when I listen to my preferred programme.*

*M1<sub>3</sub>: I'm always satisfied when I listen to a program I have interest because the information I have gotten can help educate me and my environment.*

Some of our respondents stood on the fence. They said they obtained some degree of satisfaction but it was dependent on confirmation. In more extreme cases, responses include:

*F3<sub>3</sub>: I cannot say I'm really satisfied because what they are showing us, maybe we want to change to another channel they are showing something else. So I cannot say I'm satisfied because CRTV in particular does not really show the real stuff.*

*M3<sub>3</sub>: Well at times I get more than even satisfied but at times I just feel like it has been manipulated, like there is something going on because at times you hear the journalist not expressing themselves very well especially debate programmes, you find them talking as if they've been programmed to say what they say so it is not all the time that I get satisfied with what they say. At times I even switch to other stations.*

*M2<sub>3</sub>: Emmm satisfaction is relative. It depends on how the programme can satisfy you.*

One respondent said more often than not he does not get immediate satisfaction which implies his satisfaction could be termed “delayed satisfaction”. He explained:

*M5<sub>1</sub>: Well personally I think most often I don't have immediate satisfaction but I have hope for the future because the extremes always come in either there is too much editing or there is too much critic, unwanted critic.*

Another respondent said her degree of satisfaction was dependent on a number of variables.

*F1<sub>1</sub>: I think that sometimes I'm satisfied and other times I'm not satisfied and so it depends on the topic, it depends on the people who are responding, it depends on the callers and of course the moderator and all of that at the end of the day when you put one and two together you can conclude whether you are satisfied or not. So I will say that sometimes I'm satisfied and other times I'm not.*

A few of our respondents did not find satisfaction even after listening to their preferred programmes. Two respondents answered as follows:

*F4<sub>2</sub>: Not exactly. Not exactly because most of the time they are debating and you have people for and people against with them most of the times beating about the bush and not hitting the main issue. Whenever there is a debatable issue, they may only discuss it partly or sometimes they don't handle it well at all so it makes me not to be satisfied.*

*F2<sub>2</sub>: I'm not pleased because as my friend earlier said they usually have debates. Most at times the people involved in the debates don't talk like intellectuals, so they don't really educate people most at times so I don't get satisfied.*

#### 4.5 Discussion

The findings in this research vastly support the literature in the field of political communication. Responses generally indicate that voters' in Anglophone Cameroon actively make use of the mass media during periods of elections and that is done discriminately. However the influence of

the mass media as reported by the respondents was very minimal even after some rigorously followed the electoral campaigns for the entire two weeks.

*RQ3: How does the mass media shape the final decision of voters in Anglophone Cameroon?*

*Theme 2: Minimal effect of media in shaping voting decision.*

Based on the data collected, the final voting decision of voters in Anglophone Cameroon is not directly influenced by the mass media. As evident in many of the responses, the mass media played a very minimal and almost inconsequential role when it comes to directly shaping the final decision of voters. This is discernable in theme two which comprehensively answers our third research question RQ3. It was apparent that there were several other factors that guided the decision of voters. Some talked about belonging to a particular political party which made it mandatory for them to vote for the party's candidate on the final day. Others spoke of love for a particular candidate and reported that there was nothing possible; even the media to sway them.

Nevertheless the mass media remains a very powerful tool based on the data we collected. Although many of the responses did not attribute a direct correlation between the mass media and voting decision, the power of the mass media was still evident in activating and reinforcing voters to stick with their already made decisions.

Cwalina, Falkowski and Newman (2008) in a study that compared voters in Poland as a developing country of evolving democracy and voters in the US, they concluded that in developing countries the emotional aspect and emotional relationship with the candidate weighs more than the cognitive calculation. Our results support this finding with respondents acknowledging that they will stick to their candidate on voting day irrespective of the

manifesto's presented through the media. Although this is not particular to voters in Anglophone Cameroon, it was clear from our data that there are families belonging to particular political parties and it is usually difficult to find a stray voter from such families.

*RQ2: Do voters in Anglophone Cameroon have trust for the mass media?*

*Theme 1: Lack of trust in the mass media.*

Lack of trust in the mass media which is our theme 1 clearly answers our second research question RQ2. Our data revealed that an overwhelming proportion of respondents did not trust the media and the contents they gave especially during periods of election. Most of the responses point to the fact that the mass media in Cameroon are not very objective and balance. In many instances in the focus group discussions responses were quite categorical that the state media CRTV told a lot of lies and reported grossly in favour of the ruling party the CPDM. The aspect of the CRTV reporting in favour of the ruling party accounts for the general lack of trust for the mass media. Our data revealed that the private media are perceived as better compared to the state media by voters in Anglophone Cameroon when it comes to objectivity in reporting. However the private media received criticism for being easily bought over by some candidates to report in their favour.

We also found out that a lack of believe in the mass media prompted voters in Anglophone Cameroon to seek what they believe is credible information elsewhere. Some respondents talked of tuning to foreign channels like the BBC, CNN, and Aljazeera. As against performing its supposed watch dog role, media perhaps is watching its own interest and the interest of power elites as described by Herman and Chomsky (1988) in their propaganda model. Therefore there appears to be media imbalance. A finding which is in line with Tanjong (2012) who posits that considering the segmentation of

the media into public/private, Anglophone/Francophone, North/South, Beti/Anglo-Bamelike, Urban/Rural, does not encourage a playing field for the practice of media balance.

*RQ1: Do voters' deliberately seek out some kinds of media contents and completely ignore others?*

*Theme3: Discrimination in media use.*

Our data equally reveal that voters' in Anglophone Cameroon are not only active users of the mass media but are also able to discriminate among the media contents that are presented in their quest for gratifications which answers our first research question RQ1. Incredibly, despite the fact that a strong majority of our focus group responses criticized the state media CRTV for being biased; they nevertheless thought there were no good alternatives in the country when in search for national news. We found that the drive to still watch and listen to CRTV programmes despite the odds is attributable to the fact that the CRTV provides national coverage. The private media organs in Cameroon generally provide regional coverage or may cover a couple or regions but hardly all ten regions. This is usually due to lack of resources. This lends support to the fact that some voters in Anglophone Cameroon are active media users contrary to the passive audience perspective where audiences are considered targets by means of one -way communication from media to audiences. Consistent with Lin (1999), before voters are exposed to the media, they can plan media choices according to their preferences and purpose, which in turn makes them more involved in the media. Media content consumption is regarded as active rather than passive behaviour on the part of receivers who seek gratifications (Rubin, 1994). Our finding lends support to Rubin. The participants reported that they had preferred programmes which they thought could give them satisfactions. Besides the quest for satisfaction, some respondents said

they found such programmes appealing to them because they were handled objectively.

#### *Theme 4: Achieved Gratifications*

Finally we discovered that our data coincide with research regarding gratifications sought and gratifications obtained. Our fourth and final theme suggests that voters in Anglophone Cameroon are generally satisfied after listening to or watching their preferred programmes. A strong majority of our focus group responses supported this theme even in instances where the voters did not get full satisfaction. Participant sought contents that kept them informed on the campaign trail. Gratifications obtained usually refer to the way users feel satisfied and fulfilled through particular media use (Dobos, 1992; Lin, 1999). A strong majority of our focus group responses underscored comprehensive satisfaction after preferred programmes.

### **5.1 CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study reveal the variety of views held by voters in Anglophone Cameroon in respect to how they make use of the mass media in line with the gratifications they seek from those uses during election campaigns. Consistent with research in this area, voters are becoming increasingly active in dealing with the mass media because they are able to gate keep for themselves the kinds of information they wish to consume. The data collected from our focus group sessions were enlightening in several ways. First and foremost, they deepened what is known about voters' uses and gratifications of mass media in Anglophone Cameroon.

Secondly, issues relating to fairness, credibility, independence, neutrality and impartiality are usually the bone of contention during elections in Cameroon (Acha, 2011). These issues resonated in our focus group discussions and ipso facto there appears to be very little media trust by voters in Anglophone Cameroon. Recent trends add value to lack of trust as even the American

press has become polarised in favour of President Trump or Joe Biden ahead of the 2020 presidential elections.

It also appears that there is very little or seemingly no trust in the entire electoral system in Cameroon. This has to do with the credibility of the election management body of Cameroon (ELECAM). It is possible for things to get better in Cameroon. The confidence of the electorate can be won by the media if they show professionalism. Without doubt, an election management structure is needed that will guarantee fairness and impartiality to win the trust of Anglophone Cameroonians. Thus, we concur that the media must constantly educate the citizens to see the need to be actively involved in the electoral process. The youth especially must rise above their present inertia, blind party adherence, and to refuse to be bought over cheaply for 1000 frs to 5000frs to vote for a political party (Ngwane, 2002). There exist a high level of unemployment and thus poverty among youth but they must resist selling their consciences for trivial immediate benefits like bags of rice, party fabrics and bottles of beer. All Anglophone Cameroonians must look forward and see the long term advantage of building a sustainable development policy for Cameroon.

### **5.2 Future research**

This research examined voters' uses and gratifications of mass media in Anglophone Cameroon. In our quest to learn more about how voters' make use of the mass media and the gratifications they obtained from those uses we got several fascinating revelations. However, this research employed a qualitative approach which means our findings are not broad and generalizable but specific and focused. Future research could look at the same topic from a quantitative methodological lens so that the findings can be generalizable.

### **5.3 Limitations**

This thesis inherently has limitations as with any other research project. We have employed a qualitative approach to examine the phenomenon of voters' uses and gratifications of mass media rather than conducting a traditional quantitative survey research. As a result, the findings are not broad and generalizable but instead, focused and specific. With qualitative research having as objective to seek understanding, illumination and extrapolation; these results have enriched our current understanding of the phenomenon of mass media and voting behaviour in Anglophone Cameroon.

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