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Research Article

Emotive Appeal as a Mediator between Political Marketing and Student Voting Behaviour

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Abstract—*Purpose:* This study unravels the mediating role of emotive appeal in the political marketing–student voting behaviour relationships among undergraduate students in Kano State, Nigeria. *Design:* A cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data were garnered online from 384 undergraduate students using a self-report questionnaire. PLS-SEM was used in analysing the data and testing the study hypotheses. *Findings:* The results revealed that both political marketing and emotive appeal directly and positively influences student voting behaviour. Also, emotive appeal partially mediates the relationship between political marketing and student voting behaviour. The model demonstrated good explanatory and predictive power. *Practical implications:* The results underlined the necessity of considering both cognitive and affective dimensions in political marketing campaigns targeting student voters. Political parties and candidates should be mindful of the emotional content of their messages and the potential influence of emotive appeals on students' voting decisions. The need for media literacy among students to critically evaluate political messages is also underscored. *Value:* This research adds to the emerging corpus on political marketing, voter behaviour, and the place of emotions in shaping political choices within a developing democracy context. It provides insights into the specific mechanisms through which political marketing influences student voting behaviour, highlighting the mediating role of emotive appeal.

Keywords—Political Marketing, Emotive Appeal, Student Voting Behaviour, Mediation, Elaboration Likelihood Model.

1. Introduction

Student activism in Nigeria has a rich history intertwined with progressive political movements, particularly in Kano State. From NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union) to PRP (People's Redemption Party), Kano has been a crucible for politically engaged students, often influenced by figures like Aminu Kano [1] and, more recently, Rabiu Musa Kwankwaso [2, 3]. These movements have historically stood for social justice, educational access, and economic empowerment, resonating deeply with student concerns. This backdrop of activism provides a unique context for examining the interplay of political marketing, emotive appeals, and student voting behaviour. While research has established the influence of political marketing on voting choices [4], the specific mechanisms through which marketing messages translate into voting decisions remain an area ripe for investigation, especially in Nigeria's political milieu.

Political marketing is the use of marketing techniques in communicating political party discourses across to the electorate through targeted advertising, social media engagement, and public relations efforts to influence electorate perceptions and behaviour [5]. Emotive appeal, in the context of political communication, involves the use of emotionally charged language, imagery, and narratives to evoke specific emotional responses in the target audience, often bypassing rational deliberation and appealing to visceral reactions [6]. Student voting behaviour encompasses the voting choices and patterns exhibited by students in higher education institutions, reflecting their political preferences and engagement with the electoral process [7]. In this study, it is proposed that political marketing, through its strategic use of emotive appeals, can significantly influence student voting behaviour by shaping their emotional responses to political candidates and issues, thus affecting their voting decisions.

In view of the foregoing discourse, this study examines the mediating function of emotive appeal in the political marketing–student voting behaviour relationships in Kano State, Nigeria. Drawing on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) [8], we explore how political marketing strategies that

evoke emotional responses influence student voting choices. The ELM suggests that when individuals are less inclined or able to engage in deep cognitive processing of political messages, emotional appeals can act as persuasive shortcuts, influencing attitudes and behaviours via the peripheral route [9]. Given the contested and often emotionally charged political climate in Nigeria [10], understanding the role of emotive appeal becomes crucial. Also, the legacy of progressive politics and student activism in Kano State provides a compelling setting to investigate how these appeals interact with existing political predispositions and influence student engagement with the electoral process. This study seeks to facilitate a deeper appreciation of the dynamics between political communication, emotional influence, and voting behaviour in a specific socio-political context.

2. Theoretical Framework

The ELM provides the primary theoretical framework for understanding emotive appeal as a mediator between political marketing and student voting behaviour [8]. The ELM assumes that there are two routes (central and the peripheral) persuasion. The central route involves thoughtful consideration of message content, requiring cognitive effort and engagement with the arguments presented. Conversely, the peripheral route relies on less conscious processing of cues, such as emotional appeals, the credibility of message sources, and message aesthetics, rather than critical analysis of the message.

Political marketing campaigns often employ a variety of strategies, including those that present detailed policy information and those that focus on evoking emotional responses [11]. According to the ELM, when students are highly motivated and able to process information, political marketing strategies focused on substantive policy discussions are likely to be more influential [9]. However, when motivation or ability to process information is low, as might be the case with some student populations facing time constraints or limited political knowledge, emotional appeals within political marketing can become particularly persuasive via the peripheral route. This suggests that emotive content may act as a shortcut, influencing voting behaviour without requiring extensive cognitive engagement with political issues.

This study hypothesizes that emotive appeal mediates the relationship between political marketing and student voting behaviour. Specifically, political marketing strategies that employ strong emotional appeals are expected to influence students' voting choices, even in the absence of deep processing of policy information. This mediating effect is predicted to be stronger when students exhibit lower levels of political involvement and knowledge, aligning with the ELM's predictions regarding the effectiveness of peripheral cues under conditions of low elaboration likelihood.

The foregoing theoretical framework underpins the study model depicted in Figure 1 which proposes that political marketing influences student voting behaviour, both directly and indirectly through emotive appeal. Hypothesis H_1 suggests a direct relationship between political marketing strategies and student voting. H_2 proposes that political marketing stimulates emotive appeals. H_3 posits that emotive appeals influence student voting behaviour. Finally, H_4 represents the mediating role of emotive appeal, suggesting that the effect of political marketing on student voting is either fully or partially explained by the emotional responses evoked by these marketing strategies. The dotted line for H4 indicates that this is the mediating relationship being tested.

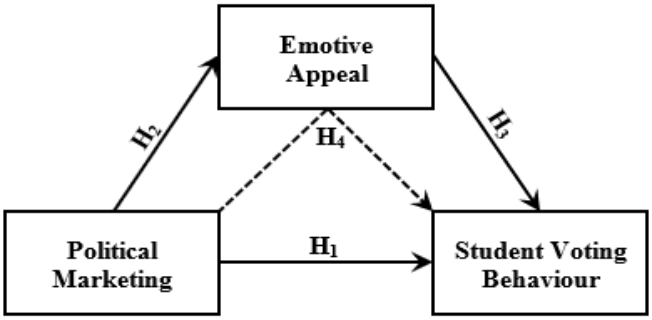

Figure 1. Study Model

3. Hypotheses

3.1 Political Marketing and Student Voting Behaviour

Political marketing, involving a range of persuasive communication strategies such as targeted advertising, social media campaigning, public relations efforts, and carefully crafted political rhetoric, aims to shape voter perceptions and influence electoral choices [5]. These strategies often involve segmenting the electorate, identifying key demographics, and tailoring messages to resonate with specific groups' values and concerns [5]. Studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of political marketing in swaying voter opinions and driving voting behaviour across various contexts [12], suggesting that these persuasive techniques can significantly impact electoral outcomes. In the context of Kano State, with its distinct political history and active student population [13], it is plausible that exposure to targeted political marketing campaigns, leveraging these diverse communication strategies, would impact students' voting decisions. Therefore, it is hypothesized (H_1) that *political marketing influences voting behaviour among higher education students in Kano State*.

3.2 Political Marketing and Emotive Appeal

Political marketing often utilises emotionally charged messaging to resonate with target audiences. This can involve a range of persuasive communication strategies, including the use of evocative narratives that tap into pre-existing cultural values and beliefs [14], carefully curated imagery designed to elicit specific emotional responses [15], targeted advertising campaigns that focus on emotionally salient issues [16], and the strategic deployment of political rhetoric employing emotionally charged language and metaphors [17]. Consistent with the peripheral route of persuasion explained under the ELM [8], the strategically use of emotive techniques helps dampens rational deliberations among voting populations and influence their voting behaviour. Given the potential for heightened emotional responses to political messaging [18],

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particularly among younger demographics [19], it is reasonable to expect that political marketing campaigns in Kano State would evoke emotive appeals among student voters. Therefore, it is hypothesized (H_2) that *political marketing influences emotive appeal among higher education students in Kano State*.

3.3 Emotive Appeal and Student Voting Behaviour

Emotions play a significant role in shaping political attitudes and behaviours. Research has demonstrated that emotional responses to political stimuli, such as emotionally charged rhetoric [17], evocative imagery in political advertising [15], and narratives that tap into deeply held cultural values [14], can influence voting decisions, even in the absence of extensive policy knowledge or cognitive engagement [20]. Also, the persuasive power of emotional appeals can be amplified through various communication channels, including social media platforms that facilitate the rapid dissemination of emotionally charged content [21] and targeted campaign events designed to evoke specific emotional responses [22]. In the context of student voters in Kano State, where political activism and engagement are prominent, these diverse forms of emotional appeals could prove particularly potent in driving voting behaviour. Therefore, it is hypothesized (H_3) that *emotive appeal influences voting behaviour among higher education students in Kano State*.

3.4 Political Marketing, Emotive Appeal, and Student Voting Behaviour

The ELM suggests that peripheral cues, such as emotional appeals, can mediate the relationship between persuasive messages and attitude change [8]. Specifically, the ELM posits that when individuals are less motivated or able to engage in central route processing of information, they are more susceptible to influence via peripheral cues. In the context of political marketing, these cues can include evocative imagery designed to elicit visceral responses [15], emotionally charged rhetoric that appeals to pre-existing values and beliefs [17], endorsements from trusted figures designed to evoke positive associations [16], and narratives that resonate with personal experiences and anxieties [14]. In this study, it is posited that emotive appeal, triggered by such evocative messages in political marketing campaigns, acts as a mediating mechanism through which these campaigns influence student voting behaviour [23]. Specifically, political marketing campaigns that effectively evoke emotional responses are expected to have a greater impact on students' voting choices compared to campaigns relying primarily on rational arguments or factual information. Therefore, it is hypothesized (H_4) that *emotive appeal mediates the relationship between political marketing and voting behaviour among higher education students in Kano State.*

4. Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the mediating role of emotive appeal in the relationship between political marketing and student voting behaviour. Data were collected via self-report questionnaires administered online to a sample of undergraduate students at higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Kano State, Nigeria. Cross-sectional surveys are well-suited for exploring relationships between variables at a specific point in time and are commonly used in social science research to examine attitudinal and behavioural patterns within defined populations [24]. Self-report measures, while acknowledging limitations related to social desirability bias and recall accuracy [25], offer a cost-effective and efficient method for gathering data on individual perceptions, emotions, and behavioural intentions within large samples. The online survey format, disseminated through student WhatsApp groups, facilitated broader reach and ensured anonymity, potentially mitigating some of the limitations associated with self-report data collection.

4.1 Survey Participants

The survey participants comprised n = 387 undergraduate students from two universities in Kano State, Nigeria. These institutions were selected to represent the diverse student population in the state, encompassing a range of academic disciplines and socio-economic backgrounds. Kano State, being predominantly Muslim, influences students' values, social interactions, and political perspectives. While English is the language of instruction, Hausa is the primary language for many students [24], influencing their cultural perspectives. Also, students originate from varied socio-economic backgrounds, impacting access to resources. While Kano boasts a history of political engagement, students' political awareness and participation vary, with some actively involved in student politics, while others are less engaged. Gender roles and expectations also remain influential. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before they completed the online questionnaire. The sample included more male students (n = 212, 54.8%) than female students (n = 175, 45.2%). The largest age group represented was 21–23 years (n = 162, 41.9%), followed by 18–20 years (n = 155, 40.1%). This demographic distribution has potential implications for the study's variables. For instance, the gender balance may be relevant when considering the influence of emotive appeals, as research suggests gendered differences in emotional responses to political messaging [11]. Similarly, the age distribution is pertinent given that younger voters may be more susceptible to certain forms of political marketing, particularly those leveraging social media [21]. These demographic factors offer valuable context for interpreting the study's findings regarding the interplay between political marketing, emotive appeal, and student voting behaviour.

4.2 Measures

Political Marketing: This variable was assessed using five items (see Appendix A) derived from existing literature on political marketing and adapted to the specific context of student populations. The items address diverse strategies, including targeted social media advertising [21], online engagement with candidates [12], influencer marketing [16], on-campus events [26], and tailored messaging addressing student-specific issues [27]. Respondents indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*.

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Emotive Appeal: This construct was evaluated using a four-item scale (see Appendix B) adapted from existing research on the role of emotions in political persuasion. The items address various facets of emotive appeal, including the use of emotional language [11], evocative imagery and music [15], personal narratives designed to create emotional connections [22], and appeals to hopes and fears regarding national issues [20]. Respondents indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*), providing a measure of the perceived prevalence and impact of emotive appeals in political messaging targeted at students.

Student Voting Behaviour: This variable was measured using a six-item scale (see Appendix C) adapted from established research in political science and voting behaviour. The items encompass likelihood of voting [28], engagement in pre-election research [29], influence of social networks [30], importance of issue salience [31], sense of civic duty [32], and the role of candidate image [33]. Respondents rate their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*.

4.3 Validation and Pilot Test

The scales for political marketing, emotive appeal, and student voting behaviour were assessed for content validity by a panel of five experts comprising academics specializing in psychology, political science, marketing, and psychometrics. Following Lawshe's [34] method, each expert evaluated the relevance and clarity of each item of the respective scales. Using the Content Validity Index (CVI), calculated as the number of experts rating an item as "essential" divided by the total number of experts, the overall CVI for each scale was determined. The political marketing scale achieved a CVI of 0.95, indicating high content validity [35]. Similarly, the emotive appeal scale and the student voting behaviour scale demonstrated strong content validity with CVIs of 0.92 and 0.90, respectively, exceeding the recommended minimum CVI of 0.80 for five experts [36].

Prior to the main study, the three adapted scales were pilot tested using data collected from a sample of 62 undergraduate students from a polytechnic and a university in Northwest Nigeria to assess their internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's alpha (α) was used as the reliability metric. The political marketing scale demonstrated acceptable reliability with an α = .82, exceeding the generally recommended threshold of .70 [37]. The emotive appeal scale also exhibited satisfactory reliability (α = .78). Finally, the student voting behaviour scale achieved acceptable reliability (α = .85), suggesting good internal consistency among the items.

4.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using a self-administered online questionnaire hosted on Google Forms. Following best-practice guidelines for online survey research [35], the questionnaire included an informed consent section detailing the study's purpose, data usage, and participants' rights. The finalised questionnaire was thoroughly reviewed before being transcribed into a Google Form incorporating features for data quality control [38]. A shareable link to the form was then generated and distributed to undergraduate students of the five HEIs studied through a multi-channel approach involving student union partnerships and relevant social media groups (WhatsApp). Responses were monitored regularly for data quality and completeness. Ethical considerations, including anonymity and data security, were strictly adhered to throughout the data collection process.

4.5 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using JASP (Version 0.19.30) [39], a free and open-source statistical software package. Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the mediating role of emotive appeal in the relationship between political marketing and student voting behaviour. Following the guidelines outlined by Hayes [40] for mediation analysis, the PROCESS macro (Model 4) was employed within JASP to estimate the direct and indirect effects [39]. Prior to analysis, data were screened for missing values, outliers, and assumptions of multiple regression, including linearity, homoscedasticity, and normality of residuals [41]. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables. The regression models assessed the direct effect of political marketing on student voting behaviour, the direct effect of political marketing on emotive appeal, and the combined effect of political marketing and emotive appeal on student voting behaviour. The indirect effect of political marketing on student voting behaviour through emotive appeal was assessed using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples to generate confidence intervals [42]. The significance of the indirect effect was determined based on whether the confidence intervals included zero.

5. Results

5.1 Data Screening

The data collected were screened and cleaned using SPSS (version 23). Missing data were assessed and found to be minimal (less than 2% for all variables). Given the low proportion and random pattern of missingness, Little's [43] missing completely at random (MCAR) test was performed. The result was non-significant, $\chi^2(75) = 62.44$, $p = .735$, supporting the assumption of MCAR. Listwise deletion was employed to handle the missing data. Outliers were identified using z-scores. Any case with a z-score exceeding ±3 on any of the continuous variables (political marketing, emotive appeal, student voting behaviour) was considered a potential outlier. One case was detected that met this outlier criterion and was Winsorized. Data entry errors were checked by examining the frequency distributions for each variable. No impossible or illogical values were detected. Finally, logical inconsistencies were examined. Two participants had responses on age (e.g., 9 and 11 years) that were not congruent with the typical undergraduate age, and their data were excluded. After data cleaning, the final sample size for analysis was 384.

5.2 Assumption Checks

Five assumptions of multiple regression were assessed. Normality of the data was evaluated using Mardia's [44]

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multivariate skewness and kurtosis coefficients. With a sample size of 384, a critical value of 1.96 was used for assessing significance ($p < .05$). The observed multivariate skewness was 1.73, $p = .371$ and kurtosis was 51.22, $p < .001$. These findings indicate multivariate normality since both coefficients are below the critical value. The linearity assumption was assessed using the Rainbow test, which was non-significant, $F(1, 383) = 2.13$, $p = .213$, suggesting that the relationship between the predictors (political marketing, emotive appeal) and the outcome variable (student voting behaviour) was adequately linear. The assumption of independence of errors was examined using the Durbin-Watson statistic. The observed value of 1.95 fell within the acceptable range of 1.5 to 2.5, indicating no substantial autocorrelation [41]. Homoscedasticity was evaluated using the Breusch-Pagan test [45], which was non-significant, $\chi^2(2) = 3.18$, $p = .204$, suggesting that the variance of the residuals was constant across the range of predicted values. Finally, multicollinearity was assessed using Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) and tolerance values. All VIFs were below 2.5 (political marketing: 1.62; emotive appeal: 1.75), and all tolerance values were above 0.4 (political marketing: 0.62; emotive appeal: 0.57), indicating no harmful multicollinearity [42]. The assumptions specific to mediation analysis, including no unmeasured confounding [46] and correct temporal ordering of variables [47], were carefully considered in the study design.

5.3 Descriptives

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the study variables. The sample ($n = 384$) consisted of slightly more male students ($n = 212$, 55.2%) than female students ($n = 172$, 44.8%). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 27 years ($M = 21.25$, $SD = 2.32$). Scores on the political marketing scale ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.02$) indicates moderate agreement with political parties' strategic use of marketing techniques. Similarly, the emotive appeal scale showed a mean score of 3.54 ($SD = 0.95$), suggesting a moderate level of perceived use of emotional appeals in political campaigns. Student voting behaviour scores ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 1.28$) indicates relatively low reported engagement with voting behaviours. The standard deviations for all three scales suggest moderate variability in participants' responses. The relatively low mean score for student voting behaviour, in conjunction with higher means for political marketing and emotive appeal, raises interesting questions about the potential influence of these factors on actual voting participation among students in this sample.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	*n*	Mean	*SD*
Age	384	21.25	2.32
Gender	384	1.55	0.50
Political Marketing	384	3.21	1.02
Emotive Appeal	384	3.54	0.95
Student Voting Behaviour	384	2.84	1.28

5.4 Correlations

Table 2 presents the Pearson's correlation matrix for the study variables. Age was negatively correlated with student voting behaviour, $r(382) = -.18$, $p < .001$, suggesting that older students reported lower levels of voting engagement. Gender was not significantly correlated with any of the study variables. Importantly, political marketing was positively correlated with emotive appeal, $r(382) = .52$, $p < .001$, and student voting behaviour, $r(382) = .35$, $p < .001$. Emotive appeal was also positively correlated with student voting behaviour, $r(382) = .42$, $p < .001$. These correlations provide preliminary support for the hypothesized mediating role of emotive appeal. The positive relationship between political marketing and emotive appeal suggests that campaigns employing marketing strategies are perceived as utilizing emotional appeals. Furthermore, the positive correlations between both political marketing and emotive appeal with student voting behaviour indicate that these factors might influence students' voting decisions.

Table 2. Pearson's Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	1				
2. Gender	0.05	1			
3. Political Marketing	0.09	0.02	1		
4. Emotive Appeal	0.12	-0.01	0.52*	1	
5. Voting Behaviour	-0.18	0.07	0.35*	0.42*	1

Note: * $p < .05$

5.5 Measurement Model Analysis

The reliability and validity of the constructs were assessed using established psychometric methods. Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's [48] alpha (α), Jöreskog's [49] rho (ρJ), and Dijkstra-Henseler's [50] rho (ρD) to ensure the internal consistency of the measures. Convergent and discriminant validity were assessed using average variance extracted (AVE) [51] and heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) [42], respectively. Thus, multiple metrics were used in evaluating the model fit.

Table 3 presents the item loadings and construct reliabilities. All loadings were significant ($p < .001$), demonstrating adequate item reliability [42]. The α values for political marketing ($\alpha = .88$), emotive appeal ($\alpha = .85$), and student voting behaviour ($\alpha = .91$) all surpassed the 0.70 threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein [37], indicating good internal consistency reliability. The ρJ and ρD values provided further reliability evidence, with values generally consistent with α. The generally higher values for ρJ and ρD compared to the α scores for the three constructs are consistent with the observations of Sijtsma [52] regarding the potential overestimation of reliability using α. Overall, the psychometric properties of the scales suggest they are reliable and valid measures for the constructs of interest in this study.

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Table 3. Item Loadings and Construct Reliabilities

Construct	Item	Loading	SE	z	p	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	α	ρJ	ρD
Political Marketing	PM1	0.79	0.04	19.75	< .001	0.71	0.87	0.88	0.89	0.90
	PM2	0.85	0.03	28.33	< .001	0.79	0.91			
	PM3	0.82	0.03	27.33	< .001	0.76	0.88			
	PM4	0.75	0.04	18.75	< .001	0.67	0.83			
	PM5	0.87	0.03	29.00	< .001	0.81	0.93			
Emotive Appeal	EA1	0.81	0.04	20.25	< .001	0.73	0.89	0.85	0.91	0.93
	EA2	0.78	0.04	19.50	< .001	0.70	0.86			
	EA3	0.84	0.03	28.00	< .001	0.78	0.90			
	EA4	0.72	0.05	14.40	< .001	0.62	0.82			
Student Voting Behaviour	VB1	0.89	0.02	44.50	< .001	0.85	0.93	0.91	0.94	0.92
	VB2	0.86	0.03	28.67	0.007	0.80	0.92			
	VB3	0.83	0.03	27.67	< .001	0.77	0.89			
	VB4	0.92	0.02	46.00	< .001	0.88	0.96			
	VB5	0.87	0.03	29.00	0.023	0.81	0.93			
	VB6	0.85	0.03	28.33	< .001	0.79	0.91			

Note: α = Cronbach's alpha, ρJ = Jöreskog's rho, ρD = Dijkstra-Henseler's rho.

Table 4 presents the AVE and HTMT, respectively assessing the convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs. The AVE values for political marketing (.64), emotive appeal (.71), and student voting behaviour (.75) all exceeded the recommended threshold of .50 [51], indicating adequate convergent validity as each construct explains more than half of the variance in its corresponding indicators. Also, the HTMT values, which assess discriminant validity, were all below the recommended 0.85 threshold [50]: political marketing and emotive appeal (0.78), political marketing and student voting behaviour (0.62), and emotive appeal and student voting behaviour (0.71). These results suggest that the constructs are distinct from one another while the items within each scale effectively measure the same underlying construct.

Table 4. Convergent and Discriminant Validities

Latent Construct	AVE	HTMT PM	HTMT EA	HTMT SVB
Political Marketing (PM)	0.64	—		
Emotive Appeal (EA)	0.71	0.78	—	
Voting Behaviour (SVB)	0.75	0.62	0.71	—

Finally, several indices were used to assess the model fit (i.e., how well the study model represents the observed data). First, the chi-square test of model fit was significant, $\chi^2(4) = 153.84$, $p < .001$, suggesting the model does not perfectly reproduce the observed covariance matrix. However, with a large sample size ($n = 384$), the χ^2 is sensitive and often yields significant results even with minor discrepancies between the model and the data [42]. Therefore, it's crucial to consider other fit indices. Thus, CFI = .96, GFI = .92, and NFI = .94 all exceed the recommended threshold of .90 [53], indicating a good fit. Also, the RMSEA = .06 and SRMR = .05 are well below the .08 threshold [54, 53], further supporting good model fit.

5.6 Structural Model Analysis

Prior to running the regression analysis, the variance inflation factors (VIFs) and tolerance statistics for the predictor variables were first computed. The results for both political marketing (VIF = 1.75) and emotive appeal (VIF = 1.75) are well below the commonly used threshold of 2 [42], indicating no issues with multicollinearity. The tolerance values (political marketing: 0.57; emotive appeal: 0.57), which are the reciprocals of the VIFs, further confirm the absence of problematic multicollinearity, clearing the way for regression analysis.

Table 5 presents the regression coefficients and effect sizes (f^2) for the hypothesized model. The path from political marketing to student voting behaviour was significant, $\beta = .32$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.20, .44], $f^2 = .11$ (small effect) [55], indicating that political marketing positively and directly influences student voting behaviour. Political marketing also significantly predicted emotive appeal, $\beta = .56$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.46, .66], $f^2 = .40$ (medium effect) [55]. Similarly, emotive appeal significantly predicted student voting behaviour, $\beta = .21$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.11, .31], $f^2 = .05$ (small effect) [55]. The indirect effect of political marketing on student voting behaviour via emotive appeal was tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 samples [42]. The indirect effect was significant, $\beta = .12$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.08, .17], indicating that emotive appeal partially mediates the relationship between political marketing and student voting behaviour, consistent with the theoretical framework. Given that zero is not within the confidence interval, the indirect effect is statistically different from zero, supporting partial mediation.

Table 5. Regression Coefficients

Path	β	SE	z	p	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	f²
Political Marketing → Student Voting Behaviour	0.32	0.06	5.33	< .001	0.20	0.44	0.11
Political Marketing → Emotive Appeal	0.56	0.05	11.20	< .001	0.46	0.66	0.40
Emotive Appeal → Student Voting Behaviour	0.21	0.05	4.20	< .001	0.11	0.31	0.05
Political Marketing → Emotive Appeal → Student Voting Behaviour	0.12	0.02	6.00	< .001	0.08	0.17	—

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5.7 Model's Predictive Power and Relevance

The study model demonstrates both explanatory and predictive power. The R^2 values indicate that the model explains 39% of the variance in emotive appeal and 53% of the variance in student voting behaviour, suggesting moderate to substantial explanatory power [42]. Also, Table 6 presents the $PLS_{predict}$ results, which assess the model's predictive performance. Following Shmueli *et al.* [56], the Q^2 values, ranging from 0.15 to 0.34 for all indicators of student voting behaviour, demonstrate predictive relevance. The PLS model generally outperforms the linear model (LM) with lower mean absolute error (MAE) and root mean squared error (RMSE) values, indicating high predictive power [56].

Table 6. Prediction Metrics

	PLS		LM		PLS
Item	**MAE**	**RMSE**	**MAE**	**RMSE**	**$Q^2_{predict}$**
VB1	0.45	0.58	0.48	0.62	0.25
VB2	0.42	0.55	0.46	0.60	0.22
VB3	0.47	0.61	0.51	0.65	0.15
VB4	0.38	0.49	0.43	0.55	0.34
VB5	0.41	0.53	0.44	0.57	0.28
VB6	0.43	0.56	0.47	0.61	0.19

6. Discussions

This study investigated the mediating role of emotive appeal in the relationship between political marketing and student voting behaviour, hypothesizing that political marketing influences student voting choices both directly and indirectly through emotional responses [8]. The results demonstrate that emotive appeal partially mediates this relationship, while the model itself exhibits good explanatory and predictive power. The model explains 39% and 53% of the variance in emotive appeal and student voting behaviour, respectively [42], with $PLS_{predict}$ results [56] further demonstrating robust predictive relevance (Q^2 values exceeding Shmueli *et al.*'s [56] benchmarks) and superior predictive power compared to a linear model. This suggests the model effectively captures the complex interplay of cognitive and affective factors influencing student voting, aligning with the ELM framework [8] and capturing both central and peripheral processing routes [57]. The PLS model's ability to accommodate non-linear relationships [42] further enhances its effectiveness.

Specifically, the significant positive relationship between political marketing and student voting behaviour (H_1: β = .32, p < .001, 95% CI [.20, .44], f^2 = .11) aligns with existing literature demonstrating the impact of marketing techniques on political engagement [12, 27]. However, the small effect size (f^2 = .11) [55] suggests a relatively modest influence, particularly when compared to studies on the general electorate, where political marketing, especially negative advertising, has shown larger effects [11]. Interpreting this through the ELM lens [8], the relatively small effect size may indicate that political marketing influences student voters primarily through the peripheral route, relying on cues and emotional appeals rather than deep processing of political messages. This aligns with research suggesting younger demographics often utilize peripheral processing due to time constraints and potentially limited political knowledge [19]. Students in developing democracies like Nigeria might also have different political priorities and engagement levels compared to the broader electorate [28], potentially contributing to the smaller effect size. Additionally, factors like increased political cynicism among students [58] and the diverse information environment in HEIs, characterized by peer influence and varied perspectives, could mitigate the impact of political marketing. Nonetheless, the significant positive relationship found in this study underlines the role of political marketing in shaping student voting behaviour, even if primarily through peripheral processing.

Regarding the second hypothesis, the finding that political marketing significantly predicted emotive appeal (H_2: β = .56, p < .001, 95% CI [.46, .66], f^2 = .40) highlights the strong influence of marketing strategies on students' emotional responses. The medium effect size (f^2 = .40) [55], highlights the substantial impact of political marketing in shaping students' emotional engagement with political campaigns. This aligns with research demonstrating the effectiveness of persuasive communication techniques, such as emotionally charged language, imagery, and narratives, in eliciting affective responses [11]. Interpreting this through the lens of the ELM [8], political marketing appears to effectively leverage peripheral cues, such as emotional appeals, to influence attitudes. This is particularly relevant for student populations who, due to factors like limited political experience and heightened sensitivity to social and political issues [32], might be more susceptible to emotional appeals. Political marketing campaigns often capitalize on this by employing strategies designed to trigger emotional reactions rather than deep cognitive processing of policy details [11, 59]. While the ELM suggests peripheral cues are most influential under conditions of low elaboration likelihood (e.g., low motivation or ability to process information) [60], this study's findings suggest that even in a student population, where some level of cognitive engagement might be expected, emotional appeals stimulated by political marketing exert considerable influence, aligning with research on the persuasive impact of emotionally charged political advertising [20]. However, the effectiveness of emotive appeals can vary depending on the specific emotion evoked, cultural context, and individual characteristics [61], contrasting with findings on older populations where emotional appeals may be less effective or even counterproductive, especially among those with strong prior beliefs [62].

On the third hypothesis, the significant positive relationship between emotive appeal and student voting behaviour (H_3: β = .21, p < .001, 95% CI [.11, .31], f^2 = .05) indicates that emotional responses evoked by political campaigns influence students' voting decisions, aligning with research in political psychology demonstrating the impact of affect on political choice [20]. While the effect size is small (f^2 = .05) [55], the statistically significant relationship highlights the role of emotions in shaping political behaviour, particularly among

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student populations. Students, often navigating a complex political landscape for the first time, might rely more on emotional cues when making voting decisions [32]. This resonates with findings on the impact of emotional appeals in political advertising [11]. Considering the ELM [8], the small effect size suggests that emotive appeals may function primarily as peripheral cues, influencing student voting behaviour through less cognitively demanding processes. Students, potentially facing time constraints and varying levels of political knowledge, could be more susceptible to emotionally charged messages that bypass deep cognitive processing [19]. However, the observed small effect size contrasts with studies showing stronger emotional influences on voting in certain contexts, such as highly emotionally charged issues or during periods of increased political polarization [63]. This difference might be attributed to various factors, including the specific emotional appeals used in the political marketing campaigns targeting students, the level of student political involvement, and the broader political context. The HEI environment, with its diverse perspectives and peer influence, could also foster more critical evaluation of political messages, potentially lessening the impact of emotional appeals compared to the general population, where reliance on peripheral cues might be more pronounced [60].

Finally, the significant indirect effect of political marketing on student voting behaviour through emotive appeal (H_4: β = .12, p < .001, 95% CI [.08, .17]) confirms the hypothesized mediating role of emotions. This finding, consistent with theoretical frameworks emphasizing the role of emotions in political decision-making [61], indicates that political marketing influences student voting not only directly but also indirectly by shaping emotional responses to campaigns [11]. The 95% confidence interval [.08, .17], excluding zero, demonstrates the statistical significance of this indirect effect [42]. Interpreting this through the ELM [8], emotive appeals, stimulated by political marketing, appear to function as peripheral cues, influencing voting decisions, particularly when individuals are less motivated or able to engage in extensive cognitive processing [19]. This aligns with the idea that emotional engagement plays a significant role in shaping political attitudes and behaviours among students [32]. The observed partial mediation, where both the direct effect of political marketing and its indirect effect through emotive appeal contribute to student voting behaviour, might reflect the interplay of central and peripheral processing routes outlined in the ELM. Some students might evaluate political messages based on their content, while others are more influenced by emotional appeals [60]. This partial mediation contrasts with studies demonstrating full mediation by emotional responses in other contexts, such as certain social influence behaviours like word-of-mouth communication [64], and could be due to other influential factors like issue salience or candidate characteristics, or it may simply reflect differences between students and the general electorate.

7. Conclusion and Study Implications

This study examined the mediating role of emotive appeal in the relationship between political marketing and student voting behaviour among Nigerian university students. The findings confirm that emotive appeal partially mediates this relationship, highlighting the influence of emotional responses evoked by political marketing campaigns on students' voting decisions. While political marketing directly influences student voting behaviour, the results demonstrate that this influence is also partially channeled through emotional appeals. This underscores the importance of considering both the cognitive and affective dimensions of persuasive communication in shaping political behaviour within student populations. The study's robust model fit and predictive validity further emphasize its contribution to understanding the complex interplay of factors influencing student voting choices, offering valuable insights for political campaign strategists and researchers alike. However, limitations such as cross-sectional nature should be acknowledged and future research could explore the influence of other factors, including social media usage, peer influence, information environment, and individual differences, using longitudinal study that would also help to examine causal relationships. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on political marketing, voter behaviour, and the role of emotions in shaping political choices, particularly within the context of Nigerian student voters.

Theoretically, this study makes several contributions. Firstly, it provides further empirical support for the ELM [8] in the context of political marketing and student voting behaviour. The findings suggest that political marketing influences students' voting choices both directly and indirectly through emotive appeal, highlighting the interplay of central and peripheral processing routes. The significant, albeit small, effect of emotive appeal on voting behaviour aligns with the ELM's proposition that peripheral cues, such as emotional appeals, can influence attitudes and behaviours, particularly under conditions of low elaboration likelihood [19]. Secondly, the study contributes to the literature on political marketing by demonstrating its impact on both cognitive and affective dimensions of student engagement. The substantial effect of political marketing on emotive appeal suggests that campaigns effectively leverage marketing techniques to evoke emotional responses in students. Thirdly, the finding of partial mediation, where emotive appeal accounts for a portion but not all of the influence of political marketing on voting behaviour, adds nuance to our understanding of the role of emotions in political decision-making. This contrasts with studies demonstrating full mediation by emotions in other contexts (Babic Rosario *et al.*, 2016), suggesting that the interplay of cognitive and affective factors in voting decisions may vary depending on the specific population and context. Finally, the study contributes to the limited research on student voting behaviour in developing democracies, specifically Nigeria [28], highlighting the relevance of political marketing and emotive appeals in shaping students' political choices within this unique context.

Practically and policy-wise, this study offers several insights. The finding that political marketing influences student voting behaviour, even if primarily through peripheral processing [8], suggests that political parties and candidates should

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carefully consider the emotional content of their campaigns targeting students. Understanding the specific types of emotional appeals that resonate with this demographic [61], as well as the potential mitigating influence of political cynicism [58] and peer networks within HEIs, is crucial for crafting effective campaign strategies. Also, the significant impact of political marketing on emotive appeal highlights the need for media literacy education among students [32]. Equipping students with critical thinking skills to evaluate emotionally charged political messages can empower them to make more informed voting decisions and resist manipulative campaign tactics [58]. Additionally, the study's findings underline the importance of fostering an open and diverse information environment within HEIs, where students can access and evaluate a wide range of political perspectives, potentially mitigating the impact of partisan marketing [60]. Policymakers could consider initiatives promoting balanced political discourse on campuses and supporting student-led voter education programs.

Data Availability
Data available from corresponding author.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Authors' Contributions
B Salisu refined the research focus, carried out the literature review, developed the research instruments, and participated in data analysis, writing and reviewing the article. A. A. Abdullahi conceived the initial study, carried out the field data collection and data cleaning, and participated in data analysis, writing and reviewing the article.

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Appendix A. Political Marketing Scale

SN	Statement	Source
1	Political parties use targeted advertising on social media platforms to reach student voters.	Bode [21]
2	Candidates engage with students directly through online forums and interactive sessions to promote their platforms.	Lilleker and Jackson [12]
3	Political campaigns employ influencer marketing to reach student demographics through popular social media personalities.	Freberg *et al.* [26]
4	Parties and candidates organise rallies and campus events specifically designed to engage student voters.	Rigby and Lee [16]
5	Political messaging is tailored to address specific issues that are particularly relevant to student populations, such as tuition fees and employment opportunities.	Newman [27]

Response Options: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Appendix B. Emotive Appeal Scale

SN	Statement	Source
1	Political campaigns often use emotional language to influence how students feel about candidates.	Brader [11]
2	Political advertisements use imagery and music to evoke strong emotions in student voters.	Messaris [15]
3	Candidates share personal stories and anecdotes to create an emotional connection with student voters.	Jamieson [22]
4	Political messages often appeal to students' hopes and fears about the future of the country.	Valentino *et al.* [20]

Response Options: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

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Appendix B. Student Voting Behaviour Scale

SN	Statement	Source
1	I am likely to vote in the next student union election.	LeDuc [28]
2	I actively research candidates and their platforms before deciding whom to vote for.	Verba *et al.* [29]
3	My voting decisions are influenced by my friends' and family's political views.	Lazarsfeld *et al.* [30]
4	I am more likely to vote for a candidate who addresses issues that are important to me.	Dalton [31]
5	I believe that voting is an important civic duty for students.	Niemi and Junn [32]
6	I am influenced by the image and personality of a candidate when casting my vote.	Kinder [33]

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