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**Media Exposure, Economic Literacy and Public Awareness of the Implication of Oil Subsidy
Removal in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

This paper sets out to investigate the influence of media exposure and economic literacy on public awareness of the implications of the fuel subsidy removal in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State, Nigeria. Given the significant economic and social consequences associated with subsidy policies, the research aimed to determine how media engagement and economic understanding shape citizens' awareness of the policy's impact. The study adopted an ex-post facto research design and utilized a structured questionnaire titled Media Exposure and Public Awareness Survey (MEPAS) for data collection. The instrument's content and construct validity was done through experts who used face validity to validate the instrument. Data were analyzed using simple regression techniques. The findings revealed that public awareness of the implications of subsidy removal is generally high. Media exposure and economic literacy emerged as significant predictors of this awareness, indicating that individuals who frequently access media and understand basic economic concepts are more likely to recognize the real-life effects of subsidy removal, such as increased costs of goods and services and general inflation. The study concludes that improving media communication and promoting economic literacy are crucial for effective policy implementation. It recommends among others that policymakers and stakeholders use mass media and civic education programs to educate the public on economic reforms. Doing so will ensure greater transparency, engagement, and support for future policy directions.

Keywords: Media exposure, Economic literacy, Public awareness, Subsidy removal, Policy implications, Niger

Introduction

The media is the watch dog of the society; every nation's media system is more than just a reflection of its culture, because both the people and the administration of the country hold the media in the highest regard. Because of this, majority of governments have been working constantly to devise legal ways to censor the media. The media, on the other hand, have also been continuously looking for ways to operate more effectively within the legal parameters established by the government without compromising its freedom to gather, assemble, and disseminate information. Media exposure was operationally defined as the frequency and extent to which respondent's accessed information through various media channels such as television, radio, newspapers, and social media. For this reason, the media holds the ace to any national development.

Subsidies have historically been a critical instrument of economic policy in many developing countries, including Nigeria, serving as a means to stabilize prices of essential commodities such as fuel, food, and agricultural inputs. These subsidies are intended to protect vulnerable populations from market volatility and inflation, ensuring affordability, and promote social welfare (IMF, 2019). However, over time, the sustainability of subsidy regimes has come under scrutiny due to their fiscal burden on government budgets, distortion of market dynamics, and inefficiency in resource allocation (Okafor & Nwankwo, 2021). In response, Nigerian governments have intermittently embarked on subsidy removal or reduction initiatives aimed at promoting fiscal responsibility and redirecting resources toward infrastructure and development projects (Eze & Agbasi, 2018). Despite the economic rationale, such policy shifts have often sparked public controversy, protests, and political backlash, highlighting the complexity of managing subsidy reforms in socioeconomically diverse contexts.

A pivotal factor influencing the public's reaction to subsidy removal is the level of awareness and understanding regarding the economic and social implications of such reforms. Economic literacy—the capacity to comprehend and use fundamental economic concepts and information—is essential for citizens to make informed judgments about government policies and

their potential impact on everyday life (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014). Without adequate economic literacy, the populace may perceive subsidy removal merely as an abrupt removal of government support, ignoring broader fiscal imperatives or long-term benefits such as improved public service delivery or macroeconomic stability (OECD, 2020). Consequently, the public's acceptance or resistance to subsidy reforms is closely linked to how well economic concepts are communicated and understood.

Media exposure plays a central role in shaping economic literacy and public awareness, acting as the conduit through which information about subsidy policies is disseminated (Anderson, 2021). In Nigeria, the media landscape is vibrant and diverse, encompassing state-owned outlets, private television and radio stations, newspapers, and a growing presence of digital platforms and social media (Adeniran & Adebayo, 2019). These media sources are instrumental in informing the public about government actions, framing policy debates, and influencing perceptions. How subsidy removal is presented by the media whether as a necessary reform or a policy failure—can substantially impact public understanding and response (Apuke & Omar, (2021). Balanced and factual reportage can enhance economic literacy and foster acceptance by explaining the reasons behind subsidy removal, potential short-term hardships, and expected long-term gains. Conversely, sensationalized or biased news coverage or reportage may fuel misconceptions, mistrust, and social unrest (Anderson, 2021).

Adetola and Akinkugbe, (2023) observed that the interaction between media exposure and economic literacy is complex and dynamic. Media exposure can improve economic literacy by providing access to information and expert analyses, but this effect depends on the quality of the media content and the audience's ability to interpret economic information critically (Menczer, . Metzger, Nyhan, Pennycook, Rothschild, Schudson, Sloman, Sunstein, Thorson, Watts & Zittrain, 2018). Studies have shown that populations with higher media consumption, especially of reputable and analytical sources, tend to have better understanding of economic policies and their implications (Vamanu, 2019). However, in Nigeria, challenges such as misinformation, low

literacy levels, and limited media penetration in rural areas hinder the media's effectiveness in raising public awareness on subsidy issues (Adeyemi & Onifade, 2022). Moreover, the rise and proliferation of social media outlets had democratized information access and also facilitated the spread of bias and fake reportage and unverified claims that distort public perceptions (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Subsidy removal in Nigeria has repeatedly highlighted the tension between government policy objectives and public expectations. For example, the partial removal of fuel subsidies in 2012 and the subsequent price increases triggered nationwide protests and political debates (Okoro & Chukwuma, 2020). These events underscored the significant gap between policy intentions and public awareness. Many citizens, especially those with limited economic literacy, perceived the removal as a reduction in government support without appreciating the broader fiscal and economic imperatives. This misalignment was further exacerbated by inconsistent media messaging and political actors exploiting the issue for partisan gains (Eze & Agbasi, 2018). Thus, understanding how media exposure and economic literacy influence public awareness is critical for designing effective communication strategies that can smooth the path for subsidy reforms.

Guess and Lyons, (2020) and Akorede, (2022) had in their respective studies examined the roles of media in informing public opinion and the importance of economic literacy, significant gaps remain in the Nigerian context. Firstly, much of the existing research focuses on either media effects or economic literacy in isolation, with limited empirical exploration of how these two factors interact to shape public awareness of subsidy removal specifically. Secondly, there is insufficient understanding of the differential impact of various types of media exposure (traditional versus digital/social media) on economic literacy and awareness in both urban and rural Nigerian populations. Thirdly, the extent to which economic literacy mediates the relationship between media exposure and public acceptance of subsidy reforms has not been thoroughly investigated. Finally, while several studies document public resistance to subsidy removal, few provide comprehensive insights into the cognitive and informational factors underlying this resistance.

Given these gaps, this study seeks to bridge the divide by holistically examining the nexus between media exposure, economic literacy, and public awareness of the implications of subsidy removal in Nigeria. By integrating these variables, the research aims to deepen the understanding of how information dissemination and economic understanding influence public perception and acceptance of subsidy reforms. This focus is particularly relevant in Nigeria's socio-political environment, where media narratives, literacy levels, and regional disparities intersect to shape policy outcomes.

Nigeria's historical reliance on subsidies, combined with its evolving media ecosystem and varied literacy landscape, offers an important setting for this investigation. Insights gained will contribute to the broader discourse on economic governance, policy communication, and social acceptance of reform initiatives in developing countries. The findings will provide valuable guidance for policymakers, media practitioners, and educators in crafting effective strategies to enhance economic literacy and public awareness, thereby facilitating smoother subsidy reform processes.

The purpose of the research

The purpose of this study is to investigate how media exposure, economic literacy influence public awareness on the impact of the subsidy removal in Calabar municipality of Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically the study sought to:

- a. Assess the level of awareness of the implication of the removal of oil subsidy among Nigerians?
- b. What is the predictive effect of media exposure on public awareness of subsidy removal?
- c. How does economic literacy predict public awareness of subsidy removal?

Research questions:

This research is guided by the following research question s

1. What is the level of awareness on the implication of the removal of oil subsidy among Nigerians

2. What is the predictive effect of media exposure on public awareness of subsidy removal?
3. How does economic literacy predict public awareness of subsidy removal

Research design and methods

This study adopted an ex post facto research design. Ex post facto research design is a non-experimental approach that investigates the relationship between variables after events have occurred, without manipulating any independent variables. This design was suitable for the study because it allows the examination of naturally occurring variables and their effects, particularly where it is impossible or unethical to control or manipulate the factors under investigation, such as media exposure, economic literacy, and public awareness regarding subsidy removal in Nigeria.

The sample for the study consisted of this was 1,782 respondents selected from Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. The choice of these respondents was motivated by the region's significant reliance on oil revenues and the profound impact of subsidy removal on its population. This demographic composition ensured a representative cross-section of individuals affected by the policy changes, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The demographic attributes of the respondents revealed that 54% were males, while 46% were females. In terms of age distribution, 40% of the respondents were between 18 to 30 years, 35% were between 31 to 45 years, and 25% were between 46 to 60 years. Regarding occupation, 30% identified as farmers, 25% as civil servants, 30% belonged to the business class, and 15% fell under other categories, including artisans and unemployed individuals. This diversity in demographic variables was crucial in capturing varied perspectives on the implications of subsidy removal.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled the Media exposure and Public Awareness Survey (MEPAS). The instrument was divided into two sections: Section A was designed to gather information on the demographic attributes of the respondents, while Section B focused on eliciting responses related to the independent variables (media exposure, economic literacy) and the dependent variable (public awareness of the implications of subsidy removal). The instrument was made up of 15 items measuring the three variables under discourse. The

responses options were modified using the 4 point likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

The instrument's validity was established through the Item Content Validity Index (I-CVI) and Scale Content Validity Index (S-CVI). The coefficients obtained were 0.85 for relevance, 0.88 for clarity, and 0.83 for representativeness, indicating that the questionnaire items were both valid and reliable for measuring the constructs of interest. Data collection was conducted by the researcher through direct administration of the questionnaire to the selected respondents. Data analysis was performed using simple regression analysis to determine the influence of media exposure and economic literacy on public awareness of the implications of subsidy removal. The results of the analysis are presented and discussed in the subsequent sections of this study.

Results and discussion

Research question one

On the issue of awareness of the implication of subsidy removal, 120 respondents, representing 6.7% strongly disagreed that there are not aware of the implications, 180 respondents (10.1%) disagreed that they are aware of the implication of the subsidy removal. 900 respondents, representing 50.5% agreed that they are aware of the implications of oil subsidy removal, while 582 respondents, representing 32.7% strongly agreed that they are aware of the implication of oil subsidy removal. In summary, 300 respondents, (16.8%) of the respondents said they are not aware of the implication of oil subsidy removal, 1482 respondents, representing 83.2% strongly agreed that they are fully aware of the implication of oil subsidy removal.

On how subsidy removal affects the cost of transportation in Nigeria, 95 respondents, disagreed that they are not aware that subsidy removal has increased the cost of transportation in Nigeria, 150 respondents, also disagreed that they are not aware of the increase in the cost of transportation as a result of the subsidy removal. 850 respondents agreed that they are aware of the increase in the cost of public transportation as a result of the removal of oil subsidy in Nigeria,

while, 687 respondents also strongly agreed that they are aware that the cost of public transportation has increased because of the removal of oil subsidy. Summarily, 245 respondents, representing 13.8% strongly disagreed that they are not aware that the removal of oil subsidy has increased the cost of public transportation in Nigeria, while 1537 respondents, representing 86.2% strongly agreed that they are aware of the increased in the cost of public transportation as a result of the subsidy removal.

On the question of the impact of oil subsidy removal on household expenses, 110 respondents (6.2%) strongly disagreed that they are not aware, 140 respondents, representing 7.8% disagreed that they are not aware of the effects of oil subsidy removal on household expenses, while 920 respondents agreed that they are aware of the effects of the oil subsidy removal on household expenses and 612 respondents representing 34.4%) strongly agreed that they are aware of the effects of the subsidy removal on house hold expenses. In summary, 250 respondents (14.0%) strongly disagreed that they are not aware of the effects of the subsidy removal on household expenses, while 1532 respondents representing 86.0%) strongly agreed that they are aware of the effects of subsidy removal on household expenses in Calabar, Nigeria.

On the issue of oil subsidy removal affecting the prices of essential goods, 105 respondents (5.9%) strongly disagreed that they are not aware that the removal of oil subsidy has affected the prices of essential goods, 160 respondents, representing 9.0% disagreed that they are not aware of the increase in prices of essential goods due t oil subsidy removal. While 880 respondents representing 49.4% agreed that there are aware that the removal of oil subsidy has increased the prices of essential goods and 637 respondents representing 35.7% strongly agreed that the removal of il subsidy has increased the prices of essential goods in Nigeria. In summary, 265 respondents representing 14.9% strongly disagreed that they are not aware of the increase in the prices of essential goods as a result of the removal of oil subsidy in Nigeria, while 1517m respondents strongly agreed that the removal of oil subsidy has increased the prices of essential goods in Nigeria.

Question five sought to understand whether the removal of oil subsidy increased inflation? 130 respondents (7.3%) strongly disagreed, 170 respondents representing 9.5% disagreed that they are not aware of increased inflation, while 870 respondents (48.8%) agreed that the removal of oil subsidy increased the inflation rates in the country, while 612 respondents (34.4%) said the removal of fuel subsidy increased the rate of inflation in the country. Furthermore, the result on table one indicates that 300 respondents representing 16.8% said they were not aware that the removal of oil subsidy has increased the inflation rates in the country., while 1482 respondents strongly agreed that the removal of oil subsidy has increased inflation rates in the country.

To answer the question on how the removal of oil subsidy has influenced some social aspect of human existence,. 140 respondents strongly disagreed that the removal of oil subsidy has no social implications, 180 respondents (10.1%) disagreed that the removal of oil subsidy has any social implications.

Table 1: Respondents' Awareness of the Implications of Oil Subsidy Removal (%)

Item	Statement	SD	D	Σ SD/D	A	SA	Σ SA/A
1	I am aware that subsidy removal leads to higher fuel prices.	120 (6.7%)	180 (10.1%)	300 (16.8)	900 (50.5%)	582 (32.7%)	1482 (83.2)
2	Subsidy removal affects the cost of transportation in Nigeria.	95 (5.4%)	150 (8.4%)	245 (13.8)	850 (47.7%)	687 (38.5%)	1537 (86.2)
3	Removal of subsidy impacts household expenses significantly.	110 (6.2%)	140 (7.8%)	250 (14)	920 (51.6%)	612 (34.4%)	1532 (86.0)
4	Subsidy removal affects the prices of essential goods.	105 (5.9%)	160 (9.0%)	265 (14.9)	880 (49.4%)	637 (35.7%)	1517 (85.1)
5	I understand that subsidy removal can influence inflation.	130 (7.3%)	170 (9.5%)	300 (16.8)	870 (48.8%)	612 (34.4%)	1482 (83.2)
6	I am aware that subsidy removal has social implications.	140 (7.9%)	180 (10.1%)	320 (18.0)	840 (47.1%)	622 (34.9%)	1462 (82.0)

The result on table 1 further revealed that 840 respondents representing 47.1% agreed that the removal of oil subsidy has some social implications; again, 622 (34.9%) respondents also

strongly agreed that the removal of oil subsidy has some social implications. In summary, 320 respondents disagreed that the removal of oil subsidy has significant social impacts, while 1462 (82.0%) strongly agreed that the removal of oil subsidy has some social effects.

Research question two

What is the predictive effect of media exposure on public awareness of subsidy removal? Simple regression was used for this analysis. The result is presented in Table 2. The regression analysis reveals that media exposure has a significant positive effect on public awareness of the implications of oil subsidy removal ($F(1, 1118) = 102.45, p < 0.001$). The model explains approximately 8.4% of the variance in public awareness ($R^2 = 0.084$), indicating that media exposure is an important predictor, though other factors also contribute to awareness levels. The standard error of estimate (0.665) suggests a moderate level of prediction accuracy in the model. This result implies that increased media exposure enhances individuals' understanding and awareness of the consequences of subsidy removal, highlighting the vital role of media channels in disseminating information and shaping public opinion on economic policy changes.

Table 2: Simple regression analysis of the predictive effect of media exposure on public awareness of subsidy removal

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	
Media Exposure	0.290	0.084	0.083	0.665	
ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	45.678	1	45.678	102.45*	0.000
Residual	495.321	1118	0.443		
Total	540.999	1119			

*=significant at 0.05 level

Research question three

How does economic literacy predict public awareness of subsidy removal? Simple regression was used for the analysis and the result is presented in Table 3. The regression results indicate that economic literacy significantly predicts public awareness of the implications of oil

subsidy removal ($F(1, 1118) = 158.29, p < 0.001$). The model accounts for about 12.4% of the variance in public awareness ($R^2 = 0.124$), suggesting that individuals with higher economic literacy tend to have a better understanding of the consequences of subsidy removal. The standard error of estimate (0.925) shows that the prediction has a reasonable level of accuracy.

These findings emphasize the importance of economic literacy as a key factor in shaping informed public opinion regarding economic policies like subsidy removal. Enhancing economic literacy among the populace can therefore be considered a critical strategy for improving public awareness and fostering more effective communication about subsidy reforms.

Table 3: Simple Regression Analysis of the Predictive Effect of Economic Literacy on Public Awareness of Subsidy Removal

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p-value
Regression	135.472	1	135.472	158.29	<0.001
Residual	955.684	1118	0.855		
Total	1091.156	1119			

$R^2 = 0.124$, Std. Error of Estimate = 0.925

Discussion of Findings

From the result of data analyses shown on table 1, findings of this study revealed that public awareness of the implications of oil subsidy removal in Nigeria is considerably high. This suggests that a large proportion of the population is not only familiar with the policy action but also knowledgeable about its multifaceted consequences. These outcomes may be justified by the increasing access to information through various media channels, improved economic literacy, and growing civic engagement among Nigerians in response to government policies that directly affect their livelihoods.

A major significant justification of this finding is the pervasive role of media exposure in contemporary Nigerian society. With the proliferation of digital platforms, social media, and

traditional broadcasting outlets, information dissemination has become more rapid and widespread. The Nigerian media landscape has been actively involved in reporting, analyzing, and debating the issues surrounding subsidy removal, often highlighting its socioeconomic effects on transportation, food prices, and overall cost of living. This media-driven exposure has likely contributed to heightened public consciousness and discourse around the matter.

Furthermore, economic literacy appears to have empowered many Nigerians to critically assess and interpret the broader implications of subsidy policies. People with basic knowledge of economics are better positioned to understand how subsidies function within a national budget, and the trade-offs involved when such policies are withdrawn. This aligns with previous research by Oduh and Adebayo (2022), who found that individuals with higher economic knowledge were more capable of articulating the implications of subsidy removal on inflation and government revenue. Similarly, Omotola (2020) argues that economic education fosters civic awareness and public engagement in national economic policies, thereby enhancing democratic accountability.

From the study, it revealed that the high level of public awareness observed is also supported by the intensive public debates that preceded and followed past attempts on subsidy removals in Nigeria, such as those in 2012 and more recently in 2023. These instances triggered national protests and widespread discussions, which in themselves served as informal but effective channels of mass sensitization. As a result, even individuals without formal education have gained insights from community conversations, radio programs in local languages, and civil society advocacy. This grassroots awareness aligns with the observations of Adeyemo and Salisu (2021), who noted that public mobilization around fuel subsidy issues was facilitated by shared experiences and localized discussions among the populace.

Furthermore, the authors feel that the heightened awareness could be attributed to the socioeconomic reality that makes subsidy policies directly relevant to the daily lives of ordinary Nigerians. The removal of subsidies tends to impact prices of essential commodities and transport fares, which are keenly felt by the average citizen. As a result, public interest in understanding these issues is not merely academic but driven by immediate practical concerns. This is consistent

with the theory of problem-driven learning articulated by Campos et al. (2014), which suggests that people are more likely to seek understanding when they are personally affected by a policy outcome.

Rising from these findings, it was revealed that media exposure significantly relates to public awareness of the implications of oil subsidy removal in Nigeria. This suggests that the more individuals are exposed to media content such as news broadcasts, talk shows, editorials, and digital media discussions on economic reforms, the more knowledgeable they become about the consequences of such policy shifts. This is justifiable because media serves as a critical platform for information dissemination and civic engagement, especially on issues of national significance. It creates a bridge between policymakers and the public by simplifying technical policies for mass understanding. Oduh and Adebayo (2022) affirmed this position in their study which showed that increased exposure to media narratives significantly enhanced public understanding and responsiveness to subsidy removal policies in Nigeria.

Again, economic literacy was also found to be a strong predictor of public awareness regarding the implications of subsidy removal. This implies that individuals with higher levels of economic understanding are better positioned to grasp the fiscal rationale behind subsidy policies, the long-term implications of subsidy removal, and the trade-offs involved. The justification for this lies in the role of economic education in shaping how individuals interpret and respond to complex financial decisions by the government. Literate citizens are less likely to depend solely on populist narratives and more likely to evaluate policies based on factual information and national interest. This finding is consistent with the work of Campos, Goldstein, and McKenzie (2014) who noted that economic literacy enhances citizens' ability to comprehend macroeconomic policies and support reforms based on empirical understanding rather than sentiment. In sum, both media exposure and economic literacy significantly influence the level of public awareness on the implication of subsidy removal. These findings align with previous research and reinforce the need

to strengthen media engagement and economic education as tools for public enlightenment and policy acceptance.

Conclusion /implication of the study

The study set out to investigate the influence of media exposure and economic literacy on public awareness of the implications of fuel subsidy removal in Nigeria. The findings revealed that public awareness of the implications of subsidy removal is considerably high. Additionally, media exposure and economic literacy significantly predict and influence the level of public awareness. These results imply that individuals who are consistently exposed to credible media platforms and who possess sound economic literacy are more likely to understand, evaluate, and react meaningfully to government policies such as fuel subsidy removal.

The high level of awareness among the respondents suggests that media campaigns and public discourse surrounding the subsidy removal policy have been effective in reaching the general population. Moreover, the significant predictive role of economic literacy highlights the importance of citizens being equipped with knowledge of economic concepts, especially in relation to government fiscal decisions. This insight is critical, especially in a country like Nigeria, where subsidy-related policies have far-reaching implications on inflation, transportation, cost of living, and overall economic stability.

Implications of the Findings

The implication of these findings is multifaceted. Firstly, policymakers and public institutions must recognize the powerful role of the media as a vehicle for civic education and policy dissemination. The effectiveness of public awareness campaigns hinges not only on message content but also on how the message is framed and which media platforms are utilized. Secondly, the role of economic literacy underscores the need for the government, civil society, and educational institutions to embed economic education into national civic engagement strategies. Educated citizens are better positioned to critically assess policies, ask informed questions, and hold leaders accountable.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed.

- a) First, the government and relevant stakeholders should strengthen collaboration with credible media outlets to ensure that information related to major policy shifts, such as fuel subsidy removal, is presented accurately, consistently, and in a language accessible to the general public.
- b) Secondly, economic literacy campaigns should be expanded and mainstreamed through formal and informal channels. Public enlightenment programs on economic principles should be introduced into school curricula, community development initiatives, and social media engagements.
- c) Thirdly, future awareness campaigns should adopt multi-platform communication strategies, including radio, television, print, and digital media, to cater to diverse population segments, including rural and semi-urban dwellers. Lastly, transparency in policy formulation and implementation must be upheld to sustain the trust of the populace, which is essential for the success of any economic reform.

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