

Impact of Political Advertising on Nigerian Electorate

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Abstract: This study gives general introduction of how advertisement influenced the Nigerian electorates as well as statement of the research, aims and objectives of the study, research questions and significance of the study. It also examined the influence of political advertising messages on the choice of governorship candidates by the electorate in Ogun State, South West Nigeria, in the 2011 governorship election. The study sought to ascertain the extent that the electorates in Ogun State was exposed to political advertising; which media was the electorates most exposed to in political advertising as well as the extent that political advertising influenced the voting decisions of the electorate. To achieve this, the study used the survey method with the questionnaire as research instrument. Through multi-stage sampling, 120 respondents were selected in the two of the three senatorial districts in the State and administered the questionnaire. The findings indicated, among other things, that the electorate in Ogun State was well exposed to political advertising; that radio was the most effective channel for political advertising; that the respondents were influenced in their choice of candidates to the extent that they perceived such messages to be credible. In the light of these findings, it was concluded that political advertising was an essential factor in the political decisions of the electorates in the State. Similarly, it was recommended that candidates should strive for credibility in their political messages, while the electorates should be critical of all political messages to decipher the truth.

Keywords: Voting Decision, Election Campaign, Message Credibility, Persuasion, Favourable Image, Manifestoes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising practice has a long history. Some scholars have traced this history to as long ago as the creation of man and the sojourn in the Biblical Garden of Eden. Eve was said to have successfully advertised the forbidden fruit to Adam. Other people prefer to trace the history to the earliest civilizations of the Persian Gulf where traders attractively and persuasively drew attention to their wares on the streets.

Modern advertising has however been traced to the activities of media brokers who acted as agents to advertisers in securing space in the media for the publication of their sales messages. Media brokers later took on the responsibility of developing the sales messages for their clients and designing them in the forms they will better attract and persuade consumers. The process of creating sales messages in a fresh and impactful manner such as could compel the attention and desired response from the consumers has remained the role and challenge of advertising practice over the years.

The functions of advertising is usually broken into (i) creative and strategy development (ii) media planning, buying and monitoring (iii) media exposure and compliance and (iv) marketing and brand management.

Even today, producers and distributors depend on advertising to sell their products. Without advertisements, buyers would not know about the existence of products and services and continue to remember them. Consequently, the modern industrialized world may collapse (Jefkin 2006). If factory output is to be maintained profitably, political messages understood and internalized and economic policies interpreted, advertising must continue to be used in the right proportion. Jefkin (2007) argues that “mass production requires mass consumption, which in turn requires advertising to the mass market through the mass media”. Apart from products, ideas and services also need to be advertised for acceptance. Such ideas could be economic or political. Hence, candidates for elections into different positions, at different levels in all countries of the world, spend a fortune to sell themselves to the electorate.

The case of the 2011 election in Nigeria exemplifies a situation that different political parties in the race for political power made extensive use of advertising to sell their different political parties and candidates to the electorate. The implication of the above statement is that political parties may have had their chances enhanced through advertising messages persuading the electorate to vote for their parties or failed in realizing their goal because they ignored this or did not do it the right way. However, the process of this message delivery is a complex one. Some of the questions that may readily come up are: were these advertising messages properly delivered? Were they properly understood? Were they completely accepted as truth? And were they able to influence the voting behaviour of the electorate, who the messages were meant for? It is in the light of the above that the study examined the influence of political advertising on the voting pattern of the Nigerian electorate, using the 2011 gubernatorial election in Ogun State as a case study.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF OGUN STATE

Ogun State was created in February 3rd, 1976 by the late Military ruler, General Murtala Muhammed and is in South-Western Nigeria with Abeokuta as its capital. The state is named after the Ogun River which runs right across it from north to south. The main cities of the state are Remo, Ijebu, Yewa and Egba which formed the acronym for the four geo-political zones RIYE. The state has 20 local government areas; Yoruba, Egun and English languages are predominantly spoken while residents are mainly Christians and Muslims. Geographically, Ogun State is strategically located; bordered to the east by Ondo State and to the north by Oyo and Osun States. Its border with the Republic of Benin, to the west, makes it an access route to the expansive market of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); to the south of the State is Lagos, the former Capital of Nigeria, and also by the Atlantic Ocean. It is rich in natural resources such as limestone, phosphate, granite stone, gypsum, bauxite, bitumen, clay, glass sand, kaolin, quartz, Cocoa, palm oil, tar sand and gemstones. The population is estimated at 5.1 million people according to 2012 projected population. Currently, there are 2,666 primary, 129 secondary and 413 private secondary schools; seven technical colleges in the state. There are 19 institutions of higher learning, notably among which are; Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta, Tai Solarin University of Education, Omu, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, Federal College of Education, Osiele, Babcock University, Ilisan Remo, Covenant University, Ota, Bells University, Ota etc.

Statement of the Problem:

During the governorship election in Ogun State, as in other parts of Nigeria, political parties made use of advertising to sell their parties and the candidates on their platforms. That advertising was delivered does not necessarily mean that it was received, nor does it imply that it was understood and accepted as truthful, such that it actually influenced the behaviour of the electorate in the State during the governorship election. Or were there intervening variables in the communication process? It is in the light of the above that the study decided to investigate the influence of political advertising on patterns of voting in the 2011 governorship election in Ogun State.

Research Questions:

This study was based on the following research questions:

1. To what extent is the electorate in Ogun State exposed to political advertising?
2. Through which media is the electorate in Ogun State exposed to political advertising?
3. To what extent is the electorate influenced by political advertising in its voting decisions?

3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Concept of Political Advertising:

Two of the promotional mix elements are advertising and public relations. According to Samaila (2003 in Sunny Udeze and Nwem Akpan, 2013), "advertising and public relations occupy the centrestage of promotion of political candidates and parties vying for different political positions during campaigns." Corroborating this view, Ansolabere and Iyenga (1995) argue that political advertising has become a veritable tool for selling candidates of political parties during election campaigns". Kaid (1999) stresses that "advertising messages do influence public perception of candidates". According to Sandman et al. (1976), "For many people the main source of 'news' about political candidates is not the news at all, it is political advertising", especially television advertising. Buttressing the above assertion, Sandman recounts a classic case of political advertising in the 1966 re-election bid of New York governor (later Vice President) Nelson Rockefeller. The

incumbent Rockefeller, he notes: *was extremely unpopular with the electorate and early polls indicated that, literally, any democratic candidate who contested that election with him would defeat him. Frank. D.O, Connor was picked for the job. Rockefeller did not only win the election at the end of the day, but won with 4,000,000 votes, a wide margin; this success was based on the strength of massive media political advertising campaign that he mounted. He spent over \$2 million on television advertisements alone.*

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING ON NIGERIAN ELECTORATE:

To say that advertising messages can be used as a powerful political tool to convince the electorate into voting for a particular political candidate, is to say the fact. But one may ask what actually is political advertising? It is the use of paid media (newspaper, radio, television, internet etc.) to influence the political decisions made for and by groups. The advertising message is designed by political advisers and campaign staff; it can include several different media and span several months over the course of the political campaign. Diamond and Bates (1992) note that, unlike political campaigns in the past, “advances in media technology have streamlined the process, giving candidates more options to reach larger groups of constituents with little effort.” Commenting on the concept of political advertising, Olujide et al. (2010) state that “political advertising is the use of the media by political candidates to increase their exposure to the public”. Advertisements, according to Olujide, have become the most commonly used technique to create a favourable image for the candidate and a negative image for the opponent, a trend which appeared to be common during the 2011 governorship election in Ogun State among the three contending candidates; PDP’s Adetunji Olurin, PPN’s Gboyega Nasir Isiaka and ACN’s Ibikunle Amosun.

Categories of Political Advertising:

There are three categories of political advertising:

1. **Political advertisement:** This gives only statements about the candidate and no explicit mention of the candidate’s opponent(s).
2. **Contrast advertisement:** This contains both positive and negative statements about the opponent(s).
3. **Negative or attack advertisement:** This contains only negative statements about the opponent and nothing positive about the candidate.

All these can be lumped into two main groups which are: image advertisements (intended to humanize candidates) and issue advertisements (which show where a candidate stands on specific, key issues).

Political Advertising and Election Campaign in Nigeria:

The past two decades have witnessed an increase in political advertising in Nigeria. This is attributed to the developments in information and communication technology and the realization of the potent force of the media of mass communication in packaging not only products, but ideas and political candidates. Electoral campaigns are marketing actions employed to get votes in elections. They enable parties and their candidates to know how to allocate their resources and develop better knowledge on how and why voters make their choices. Nwosu (2006) underscores this:

“The political parties in the Third Republic, SDP and NRC, engaged the services of Advertising/ PR agencies to develop campaigns for their parties. The governorship hopefuls and Presidential aspirants such as Chief M.K.O Abiola for the Social Democratic Party and Alhaji Bashir Tofa of the National Republican Convention made use of Advertising and PR in their political campaigns”.

Furthermore, it is worthy to note that political parties advertised their manifestoes to their customers (the electorate) in the newspaper and on radio and television. The political candidates (that is, the “products” who were being marketed by their producers – the political parties) also advertised their qualities and other attributes including their cognate experience and qualifications to persuade the electorate to vote for them. In doing this, governorship aspirants and presidential hopefuls made use of jingles of memorable songs to accompany their TV and radio advertisements. Banners and leaflets were

freely used in these political campaigns which featured the advertisement of parties and political candidates by groups of party faithfuls moving in convoys of vehicles, from one community to another. In addition to all these, artisans also employed to advertise candidates and parties. The 2011 election had its own peculiarities as Nigeria witnessed, perhaps, the most varied of campaign methods. Commenting on this, Nworah (2011) notes that: “The greatest challenges on the part of PDP candidate – Goodluck Jonathan, apart from being the only ruling president that was not elected to his post, has the task of convincing all Nigerians and eliminating doubt in them as to his capability for the intended post. It also included convincing the electorate, especially the Northern electorate, that he has their interest at heart. To do all these, the campaign organisers chose their targets, forwarded their individual messages to the intended audience and deployed the best media to do this. Nworah (2011) further notes that “some of the messages embedded in the campaigns showed in the numerous pay-off lines chosen for each target audience”.

There were such messages as, “The campaign promise is more than a promise”; “This is a promise in action”; “Goodluck for everybody, Goodluck for Nigeria”.

There were other artistic efforts from Nigerian music artistes. Such messages as “*Goodluck na talk na do leader*”, “Goodluck transform Nigeria” were all in the media. All these advertisements bombarded both the print and electronic media, and produced, in the long run, the success which the campaign anticipated. Although scholars and practitioners alike agree that political advertising is important for every election campaign, there seems to be no agreement on the effects of political advertising on electoral outcomes. However, in spite of the assumed effectiveness of political advertising, debates continue over the extent that these advertising campaigns mobilise or demobilise the electorate. For example, Ansolabere et al. (1999) argue that “negative advertising actually discourages people from going to the polls to vote, and diminishes confidence in the political system”.

Political observers believe that political advertising is persuasive and not manipulative, and that its messages inform voters about the candidates’ position and allow voters to develop differentiated images of the candidates. They add that “although more involved and attentive voters learn more from competitive political advertising, people who do not pay close attention to campaigns, such as low- income voters, can benefit from the information in the advertising messages”. This may go a long way in substantiating the reasons behind the landmark victory of Senator Ibikunle Amosun and the anointed candidate of the incumbent governor, Otunba Gbenga Daniel, Prince Gboyega Nasir Isiaka of the Peoples Party of Nigeria, PPN and acclaimed protégé of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, General Adetunji Olurin of PDP, in the 2011 governorship election in Ogun State.

Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical framework for this study is the Agenda Setting Theory. This theory argues that sometimes, the media helps to parachute the political candidate to the acceptability of the electorate through the placement of advertisement in the news bulletin. It also argues that at other times, receivers are passive, and are persuaded by peripheral route. The theory identifies two conditions that determine whether the listener is doing central or peripheral processing. Central processing requires that receivers have both the ability and motivation to think about messages. The kinds of thought that listeners are likely to have include seek audience perception of public issues and integrate a number of similar ideas including printing, story positioning and story vividness. According to the proponents of the theory, Malcolm McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), argued that the media makes certain political, economic and social salient issues in the society. They are of the view that centrally routed messages succeed in long-term change only when two factors are present. These factors are:

- (i). The target must be highly motivated to process the information.
- (ii). The target must be able to process the information cognitively.

The theory asserts that, the importance and interpretations people attach to potential items on the public agenda are strongly influenced by how the media presents stories. The media in an indirect and unconscious way position our minds whether we like it or not. The minds of the audience are directed on specific issues we tend to discuss or ponder about for hours, days or even years. Some of these issues of less importance are given much attention while others fall by the way side. The media and politicians shape public opinions on what is considered important in this time and day. Viewed from the perspective of the theory, a good number of political candidates who contested for different posts in the 2011 election motivated the electorate in one way or the other to enable it to process the contents of messages directed at it. The

particular case of Ogun State which is under study saw one of the governorship candidates, Senator Ibikunle Amosun using such cues as, “Mission to Rebuild Ogun State”, “Provision of affordable housing” and “affordable qualitative education for all” to win the hearts of the Ogun State electorate. He also made so many promises to the poor which endeared him to the electorate.

4. METHODOLOGY

In carrying out this study, a multi stage sampling technique was used. In the first stage, two senatorial zones were selected from the three senatorial zones in Ogun State through the use of the simple random sampling technique. The two selected zones were Ogun Central and Ogun West senatorial districts. At the senatorial zone level, two constituencies, Abeokuta South and Imeko/Afon, were selected through a simple random method. It was also used to select two wards from each of the constituencies.

The study at this point made use of convenience sampling method. One individual was picked from each house. For respondents who were not educated enough to understand the questionnaire, the researchers guided them to answer the questions. Table 1 shows villages and respondents selected for the study. The research instrument was a 12-item questionnaire divided into four sections. Section A surveyed the demographic components of the respondents. Section B looked at the media pattern, C surveyed respondents’ exposure to political advertising, while section D looked at the influence of political advertising on the electorate. All the 120 copies of the questionnaire administered were properly completed and returned.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: Towns and respondents selected for the study

Towns	Respondents
Adatan	15
Okejigbo	15
Ake	15
Itoku	15
Atan	15
Afon	15
Ajilete	15
Idiroko	15
Total	120

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows that respondents whose age group was less than 20 years were 17.5%; those between 21 and 30 years were 17.5%; 31 to 40years were 25.8%; 41 to 50 were 16.7%; 51 to 60, 12.5%, while respondents up to 60 years and above were 10%.

Table 2: Characteristics of the respondents

Variables	No. of respondents	Percentage Age
1 – 20	21	17.5
21 – 30	21	17.5
31 – 40	31	25.8
41 – 50	20	16.7
51 – 60	15	12.5
60 and above	12	10
Total	120	100

Educational Qualification:

WASC/GCE/NECO	30	25
Determinable Disposition	10	8.3
HND/BSC BA	78	65.1
Post-Graduate	2	1.6
Total	120	100

Religion:

Christianity	109	91.7
Muslim	3	1.7
Traditional Religion	8	6.6
Total	120	100

Marital Status:

Married	84	70
Single	36	30
Total	120	100

Respondents' Level of Exposure to Political Advertising:

<i>Option</i>		
Always	60	50
Often	40	33.3
Rarely	20	16.7
Total	120	100

In terms of educational qualification, respondents with West African School Certificate; National Examination Council Certificate, General Certificate in Education were 25%. Respondents with professional diplomas were 8.33%. Those with HND, B.Sc and B.A were 33.3%, while the ones with postgraduate degrees were only 1.6% (Table 2). In matters of religion, Christians were 91.7%, Muslims 1.7% and Traditional Religion adherents, 6.6%. Seventy percent of the respondents and (30%) were single. By ethnic origin, all the respondents were Igbo. Igbo is one of the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria (Table 2). Table 2 shows that 84 (70%) respondents were married, while the singles were 36 (30%). Table 2 shows that sixty respondents (50%) were always exposed to political advertising; 40 (33.3%) respondents were often exposed to political advertising, while 20 (16.7%) respondents were rarely exposed.

Research Question 1: To what extent is the electorate in Imo State exposed to political advertising?

All the respondents said they were exposed to political advertising in the last gubernatorial election in Ogun State. Interestingly, 50% of the respondents were *always* exposed to political advertising during the 2011 governorship election in Ogun State, while a little above 33% were *often* exposed to such political advertising. Of the 120 respondents, only 16.7% were *rarely* exposed to political advertising. This finding suggests that the electorate in Ogun State follows trends during election, particularly the one that would determine who governs them. The voters tend to show great interest in what their would-be governors are saying or giving out as their campaign message. Because they may not have direct access to the candidates, the voters seem to rely on political advertising for the campaign messages by the gubernatorial candidates. It is also possible that the electorate found the advertising messages interesting and entertaining, hence it did not have any hesitation exposing itself to the campaign messages packaged as advertising. It is also important to note that the political candidates for gubernatorial election are convinced of the necessity of political advertising in trying to win the electorate, hence they always bombard the electorate with campaign messages through advertising.

Research Question 2: Through which media is the electorate in Ogun State exposed to political advertising?

According to the respondents, they mainly access political advertising messages through the electronic media, radio in particular. A greater percentage of the respondents consider the radio as the most efficient media for political advertising. Going by this, it is obvious that the electorate in Nigeria, particularly the electorate in Ogun State, accessed political advertising more through the electronic media, particularly radio, than any other mass medium. This corroborates the assertion by scholars that in Africa, radio is the major mass medium because it overcomes the triple barrier of illiteracy, language and distances. In addition, the medium is portable and cheap to operate, hence many Nigerians consider the radio as a medium they cannot do without. And because of its portability and low cost, it offers the electorate a constant, continuous access to broadcast messages, including political advertising messages.

Research Question 3: To what extent is the electorate influenced by advertising in its voting decision?

For the electorate to be influenced in its voting decision by political advertising, the electorate must first accept the message in the advertisements as credible. The findings indicate that most of the respondents (58%) believed the

messages contained in the political advertisements during the governorship election. They believe the political messages because of the perceived credibility of the candidates. Credibility

is here defined as the consistency in telling the truth. Their conviction of the political messages may arise from their first hand experience with the candidates or may have been mediated by a third party, perhaps an opinion leader or a significant other. Or the electorate might have been persuaded by the aesthetics of the advertisements.

There is a possibility that the electorate is a simple, naïve, uncritical public easily swayed by pomp and pageantry or showmanship which is embedded in advertising. Quite unfortunately, the electorate simply believes. And without any means of finding out the truth, the electorate accepts as truth the more impressionistic advertising messages. The perceived credibility by the electorate translated into the message influencing the voting decisions of the electorate. This influence was to the extent that the electorate believed and accepted as true the message contained in the political advertisements.

7. CONCLUSION

Political advertising has no doubt served as a good political communication medium through which political candidates attempt to market themselves to the electorate. These persuasive messages produce varying reactions from different segments of the electorate, either in favour or against a candidate or political party. This study concludes that political advertising does influence the electorate in its voting decisions but that it is to the extent that the electorate regards the advertising messages as credible.

It further concludes that the electorate accesses political advertising messages more through the radio than any other mass medium.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is suggested that the study suggests that politicians and their political parties should make effective use of radio to reach the electorate during election. Secondly, it recommends that politicians and political parties should strive to give out only credible messages since the electorate is influenced in its voting decisions by the perceived credibility of the political advertising messages. Furthermore, the electorate should be critical of all political advertising messages. This will enable it to decipher the truth as contained

in these messages and consequently be properly informed on its voting decisions.

Finally, the electorate should not rely on political advertising as its only source of information about contestants. It should explore other sources such as friends, family, party members and business associates who could offer useful information for its voting decisions.

9. OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

For purposes of clarity, the following terms in the study are defined.

(1) Political Advertising: Any paid form of non-personal political communication about a political party, its products, services, ideas and political candidates, sometimes in the form of political campaigns in attempt to persuade or influence the behaviour of the electorate during the 2011 gubernatorial election in Ogun State.

(2) Voting Pattern: The way the electorate in Ogun State voted in the 2011 governorship election.

(3) Advertising Campaign: A comprehensive advertising plan that consisted of a series of messages in a variety of media centring on a single idea or theme during the gubernatorial election in Ogun State.

(4) Advertising Messages: Messages sent out in the form of advertising campaigns through the media with the aim of influencing voting behaviour at the 2011 Ogun State governorship election.

(5) Electorate: A body of those who were eligible to vote in the 2011 governorship election in Ogun State.

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