

Political Advertising in Nigeria's Emergent Democratic Process: An Overview of the 2007 Presidential Election

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Received 12 Jun 2015 Accepted 13 Jul 2015

ABSTRACT- In an evolving democracy like Nigeria it is doubtful how much political advertisements can impact on the outcome of elections. This study assesses the effect of political advertising on the voting pattern of Nigerians during the 2007 presidential election. This election is particularly worthy of scrutiny because it marked an unprecedented transition from one elected government to another in Nigeria after years of military dictatorship. Although judged as peaceful, the election is said to have been flawed by serious electoral malpractices by International Observers; and the country is once more neck-deep in preparations for a similar election in 2015. The study is limited to advertising in newspapers which carried mostly full page advertisements in full colours and employed the survey technique using a structured questionnaire to gather data from respondents. Three hundred and eighty-five copies of these were distributed across the six geopolitical zones of the country and the Federal Capital Territory, with 370 copies duly completed and returned. The study relied on two rhetorical theories – Muzaffer Sherif's Social Judgment theory and George Herbert Mead's theory of Symbolic Interactionism. Frequency count and simple percentages were used for the presentation and analysis of findings. Descriptive statistics were used to address research questions and the hypotheses were tested with the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. The study is significant in that it has provided empirical evidence that during 2007 Presidential election in Nigeria, political advertisements in newspapers provided new and convincing information about the candidates; facilitated voters' understanding of the issues canvassed; helped increase the approval rating of favoured candidates; and significantly reinforced their decision to vote for particular candidates but failed to influence changes in voting pattern. In view of its findings, the study recommends that although political advertising is highly beneficial in the political mobilization process, it cannot replace rallies and other forms of interpersonal communication in Nigeria.

Keywords - Political advertising; newspapers; communication; voters; political candidates; presidential election.

I. INTRODUCTION

Political advertising as a tool of political campaigning is widely viewed as a product of the

electronic media age. While this may be true of television advertising, the use of the media to project and market politicians predates the era of television becoming a mass medium. Then, political campaigning was mostly aimed at motivating citizens to exercise their democratic rights of voting.

By means of pamphlets, posters and public events such as parades and rallies, the electorate in the nineteenth century USA were persuaded to support particular candidates and reject others. McNair (2007) quotes Jamieson as saying that candidates and parties wrote campaign songs, which functioned like modern advertisements, summarizing policy themes and promises. According to him, Jamieson records that:

Those who pine for presidential campaigns, as they were in Jefferson, Jackson or Lincoln's times and who see our nation's political decline and fall mirrored in the rise of political spot advertising remember a halcyon past that never was. The transparencies, bandanas, banners, songs and cartoons that pervaded nineteenth century campaigning telegraphed conclusions, not evidence....Their messages were briefer... than those of any sixty-second spot ads. The air then was filled not with substantive disputes but with simplification, sloganeering and slander (McNair, 2007, p. 90).

With the invention of radio and television, however, political advertising ceased to be a form of interpersonal communication experienced simultaneously by a few hundred or thousands of people at the most. Rather, it has become mass communication about politics, with audiences running into many millions.

But this transition did not come overnight or without the imperatives of continually adapting both in communication technologies by which political messages are produced and disseminated and in the structure and culture of the surrounding social and political systems.

Blumler and Kavanagh (1999) maintain that over the relatively short period since the end of World War II, the

organization of political communication has passed through three successive or overlapping phases in many Western democracies. The first was in the late 1940s and early 1950s when much political communication, reflecting partisan positions and beliefs associated with strong and stable political institutions, enjoyed fairly ready access to the mass media.

In the 1952 US presidential campaign, Eisenhower became the first candidate to employ a professional advertising company, Barton, Dustine and Osbourne, to design television advertisements on which \$1 million was eventually spent (McNair, 2007). Next came the age of limited channel nationwide television, expanding the mass political audience and elevating the news media to ever more powerful institutional standing vis-à-vis parties and governments. The third, current and still emerging, period is the era of communication abundance.

Political advertising is a post-independence development in Nigeria. Before independence in 1960, the colonial administration had organized a number of elections into the Nigerian Legislative and Municipal Councils, beginning from 1922 (Ojiako, 1981). In none of these was there any deliberate attempt at marketing the politician. Then, political activities were limited to rallies, soapbox speeches, news and feature articles in newspapers.

The year 1959 marked a new turn in political campaign in Nigeria. That year, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his Action Group (AG) used helicopters to embark on skywriting advertising to disseminate campaign messages and distribute electioneering pamphlets and Action Group branded promotional items across the country. Bold and unique as this attempt at political advertising was, there was no mass media support for it.

By 1979, however, Nigerian politicians had come to terms with the necessity of political advertising. The oil boom of that period and the attendant expansion in commerce had accelerated the consciousness for advertising including political advertising. For example, the Nigerian Advanced Party (NAP) used a British agency to promote its political campaign.

The run-off to the 1983 presidential election reflected a remarkable improvement in the use of advertising to promote the political parties and their presidential flag bearers. The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) flagged off its campaign with the "Let's Try Awo" theme, based on Obafemi Awolowo's (its presidential candidate's) past record while he was a competent economic manager as Premier of the defunct Western Nigeria. On its part, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which had hired the UK-based Saatchi and Saatchi to package its campaign, flagged off its advertising with the "Nineteen Reasons" subject, detailing why the electorate should vote for its presidential candidate. The Nigerian People's Party (NPP), one of the three major political

parties, did not show much advertising presence (Okwechime, 2010).

But the 1990s were marked by political parties coming and going at the whims and caprices of successive military governments, wide-spread corruption and derisive or abusive name-calling in the media with not much attempt on the part of the politicians to address the spate of negative representations carried over from politics of Nigeria's Second republic (1977 – 1983). Consequently, the electorate began to manifest a loss of interest in the political leadership, and general apathy. It is little wonder that the country's leadership tussle has been mostly devoid of credible choices.

But for the annulled June 12, 1983 Presidential election won by Chief M. K. O. Abiola on the platform of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Nigerians are known to vote for members of their tribe or religion. Issues and images do not count. Thus, in an evolving democracy like Nigeria that is riddled with nepotism, ethnic and religious bigotry, corruption, electoral violence, vote manipulation, voter apathy and cynicism as well as diminished reading culture, it is doubtful how much political advertisements in newspapers – whatever their functional or aesthetic appeals – can impact on the outcome of presidential elections or other elections.

II. THE PROBLEM

In any political system, people read to be informed, educated, motivated and persuaded on the variety of options available to them on a wide range of issues in the polity. These critical functions of the media guide the audience either by reinforcing already held beliefs or eliciting behavioural compliance in favour of the source of the message.

Elections and the fortunes of political parties and their candidates for political office are inextricably tied to the attitude of the electorate. Therefore, advertising, being a major vehicle for fostering the knowledge and understanding, as well as influencing attitude switches of the electorate, must be creatively crafted and positioned to achieve desired result.

But in Nigeria, the major consideration for an ideal candidate is that he belongs to one's tribe or religion regardless of the qualities of other candidates. According to a 1991 survey on factors that were likely to influence voting behaviour during the 1992 presidential election in Nigeria, Donghudje (1992) reported that of the five factors considered by literate and executive class respondents, tribe/religion ranked highest with an all time high rate of 70 percent. The result was as follows: Tribe/Religion – 70%; Name – 5%; Charisma – 10%; Money – 10%; Manifesto – 5%.

The above scenario is bound to create doubt among scholars as to the overall possible effect of political advertisements on voters irrespective of their aesthetic and functional appeals, with regards to the outcome of presidential elections. This is also true of all other elections, at all levels of government, in the country.

Besides, the Electoral Act 2006 restricted advertising for April 21, 2007 presidential election to only a period not exceeding three months – from January 21, 2007 to and including April 20, 2007. Consequently, this study did not consider all advertising undertaken before the conclusion of the party primaries which produced the 24 presidential candidates approved by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

These scenarios have provided a rather difficult terrain for advertising to flourish as a tool for marketing the best political candidate, party or manifesto. But in spite of it all, political advertising has evolved and has continued to grow in the country, albeit, with its many problems and prospects. Critical to this study, therefore, is: did the political advertisements in newspapers influence the voting pattern of Nigerians during the 2007 presidential election?

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to:

1. Investigate the extent to which political advertisements in newspapers provided the electorate with convincing information about candidates for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.
2. Investigate the extent to which political advertisements in newspapers enhanced the understanding of the electorate of the issues canvassed by the candidates for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.
3. Determine the extent to which political advertisements in newspapers reinforced voters' decision for a particular presidential candidate during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.
4. To find out how effectively political advertisements in newspapers influenced shifts in the electorates' voting pattern during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were posed in the study:

1. To what extent did political advertisements in newspapers provide the electorate with

convincing information about candidates for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria?

2. To what extent did political advertisements in newspapers enhance the electorates' understanding of the issue canvassed by the candidates for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria?
3. To what extent were political advertisements in newspapers a factor in reinforcing voters' decision to vote for a particular presidential candidate during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria?
4. How effective were the political advertisements in newspapers in influencing shifts in the electorates' voting pattern during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria?

V. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

In addition to the research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested:

- H₀1: There is no significant relationship between political advertisements in newspapers and the voters' understanding of issues canvassed by the candidates in the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.
- H₀2: There is no significant relationship between political advertising in newspapers and voters' approval rating of candidates during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.
- H₀3: There is no significant relationship between political advertising in newspapers and voters' decision to shift votes from a previously preferred candidate to another during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Newspapers and the Nigerian Electorate*

There has always been an intimate connection between mass communication and the conduct of politics, in whatever kind of regime (McQuail, 2005). In authoritarian and totalitarian societies, the leadership employs the media to enforce conformity and compliance and to stifle opposition. In democratic societies, however, the media have a complex relationship with sources of power and the political system. The media provide channels through which the state and varied interests articulate their positions on issues of public interest to the audience. They also promote the circulation of news and opinion within a polity.

However, the media systems in most of the world's advanced democracies are converging toward the liberal, market-driven model most evident in the USA. This presupposes that the dominance of market forces in shaping media content has a specifically partisan effect, that of enhancing the ability of political parties, with ethnic interests in the case of Nigeria, to dominate news agenda and government policy decisions. This trend, with variations from one country to another, could have disruptive tendencies, leading to an imbalance between the dominant party and the leading opposition party, where a properly coordinated one exists.

However, to be able to capture required audience attention among newspaper readers in the midst of abundant and competing political news and commentary, politicians cannot but rely on press advertising perhaps to help them keep in touch with the public mood and to stand a better chance of winning electoral support. Today, it has become imperative for politicians to try to influence public opinion through a "media-constructed public sphere" (Schulz, 1992, p. 59). As Castells (1997) quoted in Blumler and Gurevitch (2005, p. 115), posited:

It is not that the media control politics as such, rather that they have come to create and constitute the space in which politics now chiefly happens for most people in so-called advanced societies.... Whether we like it or not, in order to engage in the political debate we must do so through the media.

In a media-constructed public sphere, certain formative characteristics of media organizations will exact cross-system influences on a society's flow of political communication. How far the media are commercially organized or oriented to public service and their social responsibilities, for example, will tend to shape that flow, as well as the intensity of the competition that prevails among the main media for audiences and revenues (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2005, p. 115). Invariably, therefore, how political advocates and professional mediators, such as advertising agencies, fashion their communications for optimal reception by their audiences will be affected by certain system-spanning tenets of political culture, which may vary from one society to another.

In particular, political cultures may differ "in the degree to which they value the political sphere itself as a dignified and important realm of activity, informed involvement which deserves to be promoted" (Gurevitch and Blumler, 1977, p. 283). Political cultures may differ "in the degree to which they embrace or resist populism – or the principle of *Vox Populi, Vox Dei*" (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2000); and in the basic stock of historically derived "ideas in good currency" (Schon, 1971) both quoted in Blumler and Gurevitch (2005, p. 116). Rivals for public opinion periodically draw on these differences when striving to frame contested issues in terms which

they hope will be acceptable to journalists and their target audiences.

In Nigeria, the dominant political culture is marked by the absence of patriotism, with emphasis on ethnic nationalism and religious bigotry fuelled and nourished by the political elites. The semblance of party loyalty in the system is indeed a masquerade for both ethnic and religious considerations with a dose of the selfish desire to take sides with the "winning party". Inherent in this, is that the mass media in post-independence Nigeria were mostly set up to satisfy ethnic political agenda. Thus, their neutrality and constructive criticism in masses-oriented politics were severely hampered. Hence, Uche (1989, p. 153) concluded that the media originated from the political structure of the country.

Udoakah (1996, p. 75) agrees that the society they served was fragmented by ethnic interests. Thus, the Nigerian media were structured along ethnic lines "to fight the cause of the ethnic groups and the philosophy seems to be self-preservation first before national interest". The outcome of this was that the journalists invariably worked for different politically motivated mass media. Even those newspapers and magazines, which claim to be national and independent, according to Udoakah (1996, p. 75), "cannot do any more than the biddings of their owners, which may conflict with national interest and public morality". It follows, therefore, that the Nigerian electorate, the primary target audience of Nigerian newspapers, are more likely to patronize newspapers which lean more towards their ethnic world view.

Advertising considerations by the political parties and candidates for political office invariably aim at newspapers that are more likely to reach their desired audience irrespective of their circulation figures. Geographical location becomes of prime consideration. And, though most of Nigeria's over 25 newspapers pretend to be national in their coverage of events and circulation, ownership and control are major influences in their circulation along geographic lines, except for truly national newspapers (Okwechime, 2009).

Generally, though, there is always a sprinkling of news and analysis of issues with national flavour in the content of even the most provincial newspapers in Nigeria, these factors obviously justified the selection of some provincial newspaper by presidential candidates and their political parties for political advertising in the 2007 election.

B. The 2007 Political Advertising Scene in Nigeria

Advertising is big business for media organizations, the printing houses, consultants and advertising agencies. It also increases job opportunities thereby helping to improve the welfare of the citizens. In the euphoria that followed the massive demand for advertising space and airtime during campaigns for the 2007 presidential elections, most media organizations shot their rates above

the roof. Consequently, a spot of political advertisement in the African Independent Television was jacked up to ₦105, 000.00 and ₦25, 000.00 for radio. A full page advertisement in the *Guardian* newspaper ranged from ₦313, 081.25 for black and white to ₦386, 820 for the colour. A full page advertisement in the *Punch* cost ₦272260.00 for the black and white and ₦350, 000.00 for the colour and in the *Daily Times*, a black and white advertisement went for ₦280, 000.00 and colour, ₦350, 000.00. With the *Vanguard*, it was ₦320, 000.00 for the black and white and ₦370, 000.00 for the colour political advertisements. Many of these newspapers carried mostly full-colour advertisements on a daily basis throughout the campaign period.

However, advertising for the 2007 presidential election was statutorily limited to three months – from January 21, 2007 to and including April 20, 2007 (Electoral Act 2006, p. 26). Consequently, there was a stampede within the period, by the Presidential candidates to gain electoral advantage through advertising in the mass media (Okwechime, 2010).

Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) began with his simple "Lest we forget" series, which projected him as "MR. INTEGRITY" (*Sunday Vanguard*, April 8, 2007, p. 2 & *Vanguard*, Tuesday, April 10, 2007, p. 35), with an unblemished record as governor of Katsina State, while most of his colleagues in the other states lived in the fear of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for corrupt enrichment while in office. His "Letter to my Country Men and Women" series (*Vanguard*, Monday, April 16, 2007, p. 18 & Thursday, March 1, 2007, p. 22) spelt out his unique attributes and those of his running mate, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as the ideal presidential candidates for 2007 election. Yar'Adua was to advance to the "MOVING FORWARD", "REAL CHANGE – GOOD JOBS" subjects (*Vanguard*, Thursday, March 5, 2007, p. 25; *Guardian*, Thursday, March 22, 2007 p. 20, *Guardian*, Thursday, March 23, 2007 p. 24 & *Sunday Vanguard*, April 8, 2007, p. 54) in which he promised Nigerians constant public power supply, better education and good jobs.

However, in the last week of the presidential election campaigns, Yar'Adua abandoned the "ideal candidate" sale of his manifesto and embarked on negative and knocking advertising in which he portrayed his major rivals, General Muhammadu Buhari and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar as "unrepentant dictator with a track record of injustices as Head of State", and a "corrupt politician" respectively (*Vanguard*, Monday, February 19, 2007, p. 2). Basic to his campaign was the need for stability in the polity by voting for the "PDP for continuity".

Atiku Abubakar's advertising campaign in newspapers began with a manifesto of a NEW NIGERIA FOR ALL NIGERIANS (*The Punch*, Wednesday, April 18, 2007, p. 38), which would:

- a. Provide 10 times more electricity in five years.
- b. Create a cabinet ministry to resolve the Niger Delta problem.
- c. Provide massive job opportunities.
- d. Boost healthcare and road construction.
- e. Fight corruption with fairness, firmness and justice.

However, while hinging his campaign on the "New Nigeria..." theme, Abubakar was to later engage in knocking advertising in which he outlined "cogent reason" why Nigerians should abandon the PDP, sweep "Continuity" away and vote for him and the Action Congress (*The Punch*, Wednesday, April 18, 2007, p. 5 & p. 48).

It was not different for Atahiru Bafarawa whose campaign was based on the theme: "Unity, Transparency and Performance" (*Vanguard*, Tuesday, March 27, 2007, p. 2), which he claimed to his credit in his eight years as governor of Sokoto State. He was, however, later to attack PDP's failed promises "to solve Nigeria's problems... electricity in six months.... Unemployment... bad roads... Niger Delta Crises", while calling on voters to accept his candidature and all the democratic People's Party (DPP) stood for (*Vanguard*, Thursday, March 22, 2007, p. 25).

Not to be outdone in the spate of adversarial campaign, Orji Uzor Kalu of the Progressive People's Party (PPA) initially kept to his simple theme of provoking Nigerians with "The Real Benefits of Democracy" but later moved to attack the failing of the incumbent PDP government. His attack was centered on PDP governments' claim to have reformed the economy of the country and General Obasanjo's (former president) assertion that the 2007 elections were a "Do or Die Affair".

General Buhari of the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) tried to remain focused in projecting his candidature to Nigerians as an unblemished leader and former Head of State with his "INTEGRITY" still intact (*Vanguard*, Tuesday, April 10, 2007, p. 39) without going adversarial. His "GENERAL MUHAMMADU BUHARI'S CAMPAIGN STATEMENT" (*Vanguard*, Tuesday, April 20, 2007, p. 43) although couched as a voter enlightenment "advertorial" was, nevertheless, an indictment of the General Obasanjo (PDP) regime and its failed promises over an eight-year period.

Only Patrick Utomi of the African Democratic Congress steered away from attack advertising altogether. The themes of his advertising were:

- a. "I Stand for a New Beginning... That Nigeria May Excel".
- b. "The New Face of Africa for Nigeria's national Transformation... that our country would be blessed".

This theme was premised on a nine-point agenda culminating in “Endless Possibilities” (*Vanguard*, Thursday, February 15, 2007, p. 2 & Thursday March 27, p. 2).

Commenting on political advertising for the April 2007 presidential election in March, 2007, Animasaun (*Sunday Vanguard*, March 25, 2007) wrote: “Because we have been busy blackmailing ourselves, real issues have been obscured or deliberately isolated.” On his part, Yusuf (*TELL* magazine, December 18, 2006, p. 22) observed that the posters of presidential aspirants of the various political parties in the country, preparatory to their national conventions:

Instead of employing the vehicle of credible party manifestoes to woo people’s votes, presidential aspirants resort to waging a war of posters to whip up primordial sentiments, leading to an insidious triumph of personality campaigns at the expense of ideological politics.

Yusuf (p. 22) quoted Ralph Akinfeleye, Professor of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, Nigeria as saying that:

The political ads are just like riddles and jokes because they are not addressing issues but personal efforts of their own creation. At the moment, none has provoked me to vote for him or reason that he is mature enough to head the giant of Africa. The ads should have focused on the real benefits of democracy: tell us with manifestoes, blueprint and strategic plans what await the voters on education, health, employment, food, economy and security.

Party programmes, manifestoes, past records and positions of presidential candidates must remain relevant factors in political advertising. They have an overall effect on the electorate and hence, there can be no alternative in political advertising other than its effective use as a marketing tool to show how one politician or party is different from another and to direct voters to vote for the right candidate.

Political Advertising has become an essential part of the democratic process and can be an important means of helping the electorate to understand the difference between opponents. Inherent in this, however, is the desperation of most candidates to dent the image of opponents through mudslinging and attack advertisements to gain electoral advantage. Kumar and Mittal (2002, p. 308) wrote:

Politicians use advertising to make voters aware of their record, their stand on issues, and their political vision. Early in their campaign, political candidates often run ads with positive message to build credibility with voters. Then – in an effort to differentiate themselves – they often follow up with ads that attack their opponent’s record.

But some critics believe that negative advertisements contribute to the severe distrust of politicians. For many people, therefore, elections have become a question of choosing the less of two evils as projected by the smear campaigns. This, they indicate, invariably leads to voter apathy and cynicism. In the words of Arens (2004, p. 312):

In a recent survey of voters in Virginia, approximately three fourths of the sample indicated that negative campaigns were likely to discourage them from voting at all. Notwithstanding, the desperate final week of any hard fought campaign typically brings out the worst in candidates, their campaign strategies and media advisors.

In tune with the above, Ansolabehre and Iyengar (1995, p. 9) are of the view that negative advertisements suppress voter turnout, are responsible for record lows in political participation and record highs in public cynicism and alienation. Thus, they pose a serious threat to democracy. But it is indeed becoming increasingly common for political advertisements to contain negative one-side attacks on opposing candidate’s weakness such as character flaws, voting records, public misstatements, broken promises, war records, past administrative bungling and the like (Meirick, 2002, p. 52).

Invariably, the goal of these advertisements is to discredit the character, record or position of an opponent and create doubt in the voters mind about his or her ability to govern effectively. According to Pinkleton, Um and Austin (2002, p. 22), “a major reason why negative political advertisements are used successfully is that voters often tend to weight negative information more heavily than positive information when forming impressions of political candidates.”

However, studies have shown that the use of “attacks advertising” by politicians can result in negative perception of the candidate himself. Arens (2004, p. 313) was convinced that sometimes, negative advertisements serve “more as a reflection of the sponsor’s poor taste than the apparent lack of suitability” of the opponent. In their study of negative political advertising, Chang, Park and Shim (1998, p. 12) found that negative political advertising produced negative evaluations of both the sponsor and the target.

But the nagging question has been whether political advertising really influences the political process and if so, to what extent, and in what way? The nature of its effects – behavioural, short-, medium- or long-term; direct or indirect; social or psychological – are yet not too clear to social scientists and observers of the political scene. Nevertheless, political gladiators in their continuous bid to fester their political nests are convinced that there are obvious effects, which justify their enormous expenditure in time and resources.

Nwosu (1992) noted that a number of empirical studies carried out in Britain to attempt to resolve the issue of mass media influence on the political process revealed that the influence was only ephemeral. The finding was that the mass media only helped in increasing the British voters' levels of political information. "The conclusion from the pioneering studies", the author noted, "was that political advertising cannot change political attitude; it can only reinforce political opinions held" (p. 67).

A MORI opinion poll conducted during the British general election of June 1987 indicates that the determinants of voting behaviour, particularly for the middle-of-the-road, floating or undecided voters who would ultimately decide the outcome of the election are three-fold (Worchester, 1991, p. 140). These include:

- * The image of the party's policy - 44 per cent;
- * The voters' image of the party's leadership - 35 per cent; and
- * The image of the party itself - 21 per cent.

Although each of the above critical aspects of the party's image profile, which when communicated, are capable of exerting the necessary influence on political behaviour, the outcome of the polls is uncannily silent on the image of the candidate himself and other environmental factors. This has led some researchers like Cundy (1986, p. 232) to suggest that the effects of political advertising are in inverse proportion to the audience's knowledge of the party or candidate being advertised and that once a candidate's image has been developed, new information is unlikely to generate any appreciable change. This may hold true for most advertisements regardless of their aesthetic qualities.

An advertisement may, therefore, receive accolades from commentators and analysts, while failing to sway voters towards the desired party or candidate. However, it must not be forgotten that in the political terrain, an array of mediating environmental factors intervene in the communicator-receiver relationship, which can affect the audience's perception of the message. These invariably exert a favourable or unfavourable impact on the voter's attitude and behaviour. Again, the content of a campaign message is, shaped by the same perceptual environmental factors within which the campaign operates.

But the media are, nevertheless, critical factors that cannot be neglected by politicians in considering both public attitude formation or reinforcement and the political process. Besides, we must not lose sight of these comments of Baudrillard (1988: 210) that "we will never know if an advertisement or opinion poll has had a real influence on individual or collective will, but we will never know either what would have happened if there had been no opinion poll or advertisement." Increasing researches of the nature of this study may yet unravel the

mystery of the effects of political advertising on voters' attitudes and behaviour as well as the political process.

VII. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study, which focuses on the relationship between advertising, as communication, and its effect on the electoral process in Nigeria's 2007 presidential election, was built around two rhetorical communication theories, which emphasize persuasion as a compliance-gaining strategy – Muzafer Sherif's Social Judgment theory and George Herbert Mead's theory of Symbolic Interactionism.

A. Research Design

The research design adopted was analytical survey. This method was employed because the population of the study was widespread, and in order to be able to examine the interrelationship between political advertising, and other intervening variables, and the electorate voting patterns in Nigeria.

B. Population

The population of this study was all registered voters, males and females, across the country, who read newspapers. Official figures compiled from the 2008 publication of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), *Nigeria Atlas of Electoral Constituencies*, indicated that 63,039,741 prospective voters were registered for the 2007 general elections in the country.

This study took into consideration the country's six geopolitical zones, each made up of a cluster of states, comprising the following:

- (a) South East, with 8,018,047 registered voters;
- (b) South West, with 10,915,782 registered voters;
- (c) South-South, with 9,129,446 registered voters;
- (d) North East, with 9,296,802 registered voters;
- (e) North West, with 15,898,802 registered voters; and
- (f) North Central, with 9,011,710 registered voters.

The Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) provided the remaining 769,719 registered voters across the country. However, since it was impracticable to study the entire registered voters in Nigeria, it was necessary to redefine the study population by selecting the registered voters in the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) and one state from each of the six geopolitical zones in the country on the basis of the highest voters' population in each zone. This was done to ensure that each zone was proportionally represented. Thus, the population of this study was 18,001,312 registered voters across the country who read newspapers, as detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Population of the study: distribution of registered voters in FCT (Abuja) and selected states across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones.

Geopolitical Zone	State	Registered Voters
South-East	Enugu	2,050,175
South-West	Lagos	4,204,000
South-South	Rivers	2,541,690
North-East	Bauchi	2,211,463
North-West	Kano	4,072,597
North-Central	Benue	2,151,668
FCT (Abuja)	-	769,719
Total		18,001,312

C. Sample and Sampling Technique

A proportionate sampling technique was employed to obtain a sample size that could reflect the population of registered voters in the selected states. Thus, from each of the six states that constituted the population of this study a sample was obtained, using Meyer’s (1979) formula:

$$n = U \times \frac{z^2}{E^2} = \frac{1}{4} \times \frac{(1.96)^2}{(.05)^2} = \frac{3.842}{4(.0025)} = 384,$$

where: n = sample

v = variance for 50-50 split in attributes = ¼

z = standard deviation = 1.96

E = amount of error expressed in decimal = .05

According to Meyer (1979, p. 123), the formula assures an error of no more than five percent at 95 percent confidence level. However, the sample size for this study was rounded up to 385 registered voters across the country. This was done to ensure an even spread of 55 respondents in the capitals of each of the selected states and the Federal Capital Territory rather than the 54.86 that would have resulted from a sample size of 384. The sample was purposively drawn from among available civil/public servants, company executives, students in tertiary institutions and traders. Every respondent for this study was selected on the basis of having read newspapers during the 2007 presidential election campaign, thus having been exposed to the political advertisements of the candidates, and being available during the administration of the questionnaire.

D. Description of Research Instrument

The data were collected with the aid of a structured questionnaire, which was tailored to reflect the basic purpose of the research. The questionnaire contained 21 items, all of which were closed-ended questions. This was because a complex research topic such as media use and media effects study requires more detailed questions than

does a survey to determine favourite radio station or magazine (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000, p. 163).

The demographics in the questionnaire were introduced because an appreciation of the effects of media messages requires an understanding of the social undercurrents of a given communication situation and an acknowledgement of the potential for differential decoding of the message; the plurality of meanings which may be given to it across the diversity of groups, individuals who make up its audience; and the various responses it may provoke. The ways individuals interpret and respond to messages are invariably dependent firstly, on the context of reception of the message, incorporating such factors as political affiliation, age, gender, ethnicity, level of income and/or employment of the receiver particularly in a plural society like Nigeria; and then on the type of message transmitted.

According to Burgoon and Ruffner (1978, p. 341), people with similar characteristics (e.g. age, gender, urban or rural residency, etc) will also have “similar folkways in spite of homogeneity and modern society”. Thus, media exposure, media preferences and communication effects can be determined according to such broad social categories.

In other words, the questionnaire had sections for demographic variables, newspaper reading habits, respondents’ awareness of, and reactions to, the political advertisements of the 2007 presidential candidates. Some of the questions were phrased in multi-choice format which allowed respondents to choose from several options, while one question required a dichotomous response. Other questions were structured on the five-point scale rating format of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, undecided with ratings of 4, 3, 2, 1, 0 respectively. This arrangement which places “undecided”, “uncertain” or the “neutral point” last with a zero value is in consonance with the modified Likert-type opinion/attitude scale (Nworgu, 1991: 117). This is contrary to the standard Likert scale which gives a score of three (3) to “undecided” when placed at the mid-point.

The proponents of this modified Likert-type scale insist that the 3-score given to “undecided” positioned at the mid-point is unrealistic; and argue that such score of three cannot be positioned half-way on the continuum. They hold that having “no opinion” cannot attract a score of 3 on a scale with a maximum value of 5. No matter the scale value, according to Nworgu (1991), it should not attract any score. It should be interpreted as absence of attitude. If the scale has zero (0) for “no opinion” or “undecided”, that is 4, 3, 2, 1, 0, the mean will be:

$$\frac{4 + 3 + 2 + 1 + 0}{5} = \frac{10}{5} = 2.0$$

This means that any factor with 2.0 or above as mean should be positive, while those less than 2.0 should be

regarded as negative – not a factor as perceived by the respondents (Uzoagulu, 1998, p. 125).

E. Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the 385 copies of the research questionnaire distributed across the six geographical zones of the country, 370 fully completed copies, which represented 96.10 percent response rate, were retrieved and analysed.

Table 2: Distribution of Democratic Characteristics of Respondents by Sex

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	250	67.54
Female	120	32.43
Total	370	100

Table 2 shows that male respondents outnumbered the females, accounting for 250 (67.54%) of the sample, as against the 120 females (32.43%). Many females approached with the questionnaire showed reluctance to respond. They were mostly apathetic due to the political nature of the study. Some others indicated general disinclination towards newspaper readership.

Table 3: Distribution of Responses on Political Advertisements reading Habits during the Presidential Election Campaign.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	185	50
Twice weekly	27	7.30
Once weekly	50	13.51
Biweekly	8	2.16
Once in a while	100	27.03
Total	370	100

Table 3 indicates that 185 (50%) respondents read political advertisements in the newspapers daily and digested them. One hundred respondents (27.03%) read the newspaper once in a while and digested the advertisements. The twice weekly advertisement readers were 27 (7.30%) while the biweekly readers were 8 (2.16%). And the once weekly readers accounted for 13.51% (50 respondents).

Table 4: Distribution of Responses on whether political Advertisements in Newspapers Provided Convincing Information about the Candidates.

Categories	Frequency (f)	Scores (x)	fx	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	58	4	232	15.68
Agree	140	3	432	37.84
Disagree	93	2	186	25.14
Strongly disagree	36	1	36	9.73

Neutral	43	0	0	11.62
Total	370		874	100
Mean	74		174.8	

Table 4 shows that 198 (53.52%) of the respondents agreed, 58 (15.68%) of them strongly, that political advertisements in newspapers provided them with convincing information about the presidential candidates; 129 (34.86%) disagreed, while 43 (11.62%) were neutral.

Table 5: Distribution of Responses on whether Political Advertisements in Newspapers facilitate Understanding of issues canvassed by the Candidates.

Categories	Frequency (f)	Scores (x)	fx	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	66	4	264	17.84
Agree	152	3	456	41.08
Disagree	92	2	184	24.86
Strongly disagree	34	1	34	9.19
Neutral	26	0	0	7.03
Total	370		938	100
Mean	74		187.6	

Table 5 shows that 218 (58.92%) of the respondents agreed that political advertisements in newspapers facilitated their understanding of issues canvassed by the presidential candidates, 126 (34.05%) disagreed, while 26 (7.03%) were neutral.

Table 6: Distribution of Responses on whether Political Advertisements in Newspapers Increased Approval rating of Favoured Candidates.

Categories	Frequency (f)	Scores (x)	fx	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	74	4	296	20.00
Agree	145	3	435	39.19
Disagree	76	2	152	20.54
Strongly disagree	30	1	30	8.11
Neutral	45	0	0	12.16
Total	370		913	100
Mean	74		182.60	

Table 6 shows that 219 (59.19%) of the respondents agreed that political advertisements in newspapers increased the approval rating of their favoured presidential candidates, 106 (28.65%) disagreed, while 45 (12.16%) were undecided.

Table 7: Distribution of Responses on whether Political Advertisements in Newspapers Reinforced Decision on vote for a Particular Candidate.

Categories	Frequency (f)	Scores (x)	fx	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	75	4	300	20.27
Agree	124	3	372	33.51
Disagree	100	2	200	27.03
Strongly disagree	33	1	33	8.92
Neutral	38	0	0	10.27
Total	370		905	100
Mean	74		181	

Table 7 shows that 199 (53.78%) of the respondents agreed that political advertisements in newspapers reinforced their decision to vote for their favoured candidates, 133 (35.95%) disagreed, while 38 (10.27%) were undecided.

Table 8: Distribution of Responses on whether Political Advertisements in Newspapers influenced changes in voting pattern.

Categories	Frequency (f)	Scores (x)	fx	Percentages (%)
Strongly Agree	30	4	120	8.11
Agree	90	3	270	24.32
Disagree	162	2	324	43.78
Strongly Disagree	50	1	50	13.51
Neutral	38	0	0	10.27
Total	370		764	100
Mean	74		152.80	

Table 8 indicates that only 120 (32.43%) of the respondents agreed that political advertisements in newspapers convinced them to change from their previously favoured candidate to vote for another one. On the other hand, the majority of respondents (212 or 57.29%) disagreed, while 38 (10.27%) were undecided.

F. Testing of Hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested with Pearson product-moment correlation, symbolized as *r*, and varying between -1.00 and +1.00. A correlation coefficient of -1.00 indicates a perfect relationship in the negative direction, while a +1.00 indicates a perfect positive correlation. The lowest value of 0.00 represents absolutely no relationship between two variables. It was computed with the following formula:

$$r = \frac{N\sum XY - \sum X\sum Y}{\sqrt{[N\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

where: X and Y = Original scores

N = Number of pairs of scores

∑ = Summation symbol

∑XY = Sum of the products of each X and Y

To determine the sum of the products of each of X and Y, each x variable was multiplied by its corresponding Y variable and the results were added. The degree of freedom (df) = N – 2

$$= 5 - 2$$

$$= 3$$

Critical r value at df = 3 at 0.05 level of significance, based on the α levels for the Two-Tailed test drawn from the Pearson r Table= 0.8783.

Decision Rule: To be significant, the r obtained from the data (calculated r) must be equal or greater than the value of the above critical r. Therefore, if the calculated value is equal to or greater than critical or Table value r, the null hypothesis should be rejected. If, however, the calculated r is less than the critical r, then the Null hypothesis should be upheld.

D) Hypothesis One

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between political advertisements in newspapers and voters' understanding of issues canvassed by the candidates for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria. Data for testing the hypothesis above are drawn from Tables 4 and 5 and presented below.

Table 9: Distribution of Responses on Advertising Message evaluation and Voters' Understanding of issues Canvassed by the Candidates.

	X	Y	XY	X ²	Y ²
A	58	66	3828	3364	4356
B	140	152	21280	19600	23104
C	93	92	8556	8649	8464
D	36	34	1224	1296	1156
E	43	26	1118	1849	676
∑	370	370	36006	34758	37756
	Pearson r	0.985882			

Since the calculated r is 0.9859, which is greater than the critical r (0.8783) at a level of significance of 0.05 and degree of freedom of N – 2, 0.9859 ≥ 0.8783, the null

hypothesis stated above is rejected. The data, on the basis of the analysis above, suggest there was a significant relationship between political advertising in newspapers and the voters’ understanding of issues canvassed by the candidates for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria. They also reveal that the voters’ understanding of the issues canvassed by the candidates is related to the political messages they received on the elections through political advertisements. The strength of the relationship is positive and almost perfect. Therefore, political advertisements in newspapers greatly influence the voters’ understanding of issues canvassed by a candidate whether they vote for the candidate or not. Furthermore, since the calculated r is positive, it follows that the relationship between the variables would suggest that as political advertising increases in newspapers, voters’ understanding of the issues canvassed increases commensurately.

II) Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between political advertising in newspapers and voters’ approval rating of candidates during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.

TABLE 10: Distribution of respondents’ evaluation of political advertisements and approval rating of candidates.

	X	y	xy	x ²	y ²
a	58	74	4292	3364	5476
b	140	145	20300	19600	21025
c	93	76	7068	8649	5776
d	36	30	1080	1296	900
e	43	45	1935	1849	2025
Σ	370	370	34675	34758	35202
	Pearson r	0.960278			

Since calculated r is greater than critical r at a level of significance of 0.05 and degree of freedom of $N - 2$, $0.9603 \geq 0.8783$, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between political advertisements in newspapers and the voters’ approval rating of the candidates during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria is rejected. The value for the Pearson r is derived from items Eleven and Fourteen of the questionnaire. It, therefore, implies that voters’ approval rating of candidates is significantly related to the level of political advertisements that they were exposed to in newspapers during the 2007 presidential elections. Hence, political advertising in newspapers significantly influenced voters’ ratings of the candidates during the 2007 presidential elections.

Similarly, with the calculated r being positive, the relationship between the variables suggests that as political advertising increases in newspapers, voters’ approval rating of their choice candidate would likewise increase.

III) Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between political advertising in newspapers and the voters’ decision to shift votes from a previously preferred candidate to another during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.

TABLE 11: Distribution of respondents’ evaluation of political advertising and its influence on changes in voting pattern.

	x	y	xy	x ²	y ²
A	58	30	1740	3364	900
B	140	90	12600	19600	8100
C	93	162	15066	8649	26244
D	36	50	1800	1296	2500
e	43	38	1634	1849	1444
Σ	370	370	32840	34758	39188
	Pearson r	0.584972			

Calculating the Pearson r and observing the decision rule, the null hypothesis above is accepted on the ground that calculated r (0.5849) is less than the critical r (0.8783). Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between political advertising in newspapers and voters’ decision to shift votes from a previously preferred candidate to another during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria is accepted.

The implication, here, is that there was no correlation between political advertising in newspapers during the 2007 presidential election campaign in Nigeria and the voters’ decision to change their votes in favour of particular candidates during the election. The political advertisements had provided voters with new and convincing information about the candidates, facilitated their understanding of issues canvassed and impressed on the voters to vote, with few exceptions, but did not influence changes on their voting pattern.

IV) Research Question One

To what extent did political advertisements in newspapers provide the electorate with convincing information about candidates for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria?

Table 4 provides the answer to the above research Question, with 198 (53.52%) of the respondents agreeing that political advertisements in newspapers were significant in providing them with convincing information, 58 (15.68%) of them strongly. With a mean agreement above the 2.0 mark, therefore, the respondents were positive that political advertisements in newspapers provided them with convincing information about the candidates for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.

Political campaigns, no doubt, involve canvassing votes. From the answer to the above research Question, it is obvious that advertising, as persuasive strategic

communication and a tool of marketing and sales management, provides the audience with information on the basis of which to decode one way or the other towards the brand, which in the case of this study is a presidential candidate.

V) *Research Question Two*

To what extent did political advertisements in newspapers enhance the electorate's understanding of issues canvassed by the candidates for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria?

Table 5 provides the answer to the above research question. The Table indicates that the respondents significantly agreed that political advertisements in newspapers facilitated their understanding of issues canvassed by the candidates. Two hundred and eighteen (58.92%) agreed, 66 (17.84%) of them strongly; 126 (34.05%) disagreed while 26 (7.03%) were undecided.

Evidently, therefore, political advertisements in newspapers facilitate voters' understanding of issues canvassed by the presidential candidates. This is understandable when considered against the fact that a newspaper advertisement can be read over and over again for comprehension as against the output of the more transient broadcast media. Thus, there was a significant relationship between political advertisement in newspapers and the voters understanding of issues canvassed by the candidates for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria as indicated in the rejection of null hypothesis number one.

VI) *Research Question Three*

To what extent were political advertisements in newspapers a factor in reinforcing voters' decision to vote for a particular presidential candidate during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria?

Table 7 provides the answer to the above research Question. Table 7 shows that 199 (53.78%) of the respondents agreed, 75 (20.27%) of them strongly, that political advertisements in newspapers actually reinforce their decision to vote for the favoured candidates during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria. With an agreement mean of above 2.0, there is significant consensus on the part of the respondents that political advertisements not only provided them with new and convincing information, but also reinforced their decision to vote for a particular candidate. One hundred and thirty-three disagreed.

VII) *Research Question Four*

How effective were the political advertisements in newspapers in influencing shifts in the electorate's voting pattern during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria?

In Table 8, the majority of respondents (212 or 57.29%) disagreed that political advertisements influenced them to change from their previously favoured candidate to vote for another one. Another 38 (10.27%) were

undecided, while only 120 (32.43%) agreed that they were influenced to change from one candidate to another. Therefore, exposure to political advertisements in newspapers did not influence changes in the electorate's voting pattern during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria, as indicated by the acceptance of null hypothesis number three.

VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The mass media in Nigeria were awash with political advertisements sponsored by political parties, candidates for political offices and their promoters during the 2007 general elections. The presidential candidates were major spenders in this regard to the extent that media advertising rate shot up astronomically for political advertisements. The focus of this study was to assess the effect of political advertising on the voting pattern of Nigerians during the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria.

The study was limited to advertising in newspapers which carried mostly full page advertisements and in full colour, the medium being a major purveyor of communication for social, economic and political mobilization among the literate class who invariably constitute the opinion leaders in the society.

The study employed the survey technique for data collection, with a structured questionnaire. Three hundred and seventy copies of the questionnaire were returned out of the 385 copies distributed across the six geopolitical zones of the country. Following the analysis of the data collected and the discussion of findings, the following conclusion has been made: Advertising has become an indispensable tool of marketing, social and political mobilization. It is fast becoming "the campaign".

This study has revealed that during the 2007 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria, political advertisements in newspapers provided new and convincing information about the candidates; facilitated voters' understanding of the issues canvassed, helped to increase the approval rating of favoured candidates, significantly reinforced their decision to vote for particular candidates but failed to promote shifts in their voting pattern.

Therefore, campaign managers and advertising agencies should not expect political advertising in newspapers to influence shift in the voting pattern of the electorate. Rather, they should view political advertising in newspapers as communication that helps to inform and educate voters on the suitability of candidates and what they and their parties represent in order to reinforce their hold on party, religious and ethnic loyalists.

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