


Political Advertising in Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election

Tejumaiye, J A ¹ ; Simon, G I; Obia, V A ¹ Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, Akoka, Nigeria, Tel: 234-8098089132; 234-8055266955; E-mail: pojutejumaiye@yahoo.com; jtejumaiye@unilag.edu.ng . Global Media Journal ; Hammond Vol. 16, Iss. 31, (Dec 2018): 1.

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

This study, 'Influence of political advertising in Nigeria's 2015 Presidential election in Lagos state' examined the role political advertising played in the said election. The research questions of the study are: did political advertising messages alone influence voting decision of the electorates in the 2015 Presidential election? What other factors, besides political advertising, influenced voting decision in the 2015 Presidential election? What were voters' perceived intentions of political advertising messages in the 2015 Presidential election? What was the behavior of voters towards political advertising messages in the 2015 Presidential election? Information processing theory of William McGuire was used as the theoretical framework. Survey research method was applied and questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. Multistage sampling method was adopted and 400 copies of the instrument were distributed in five randomly selected local government areas of Lagos state. However, 396 were returned and four were deemed invalid. Therefore, 392 copies of the questionnaires, representing 98%, were analyzed.

FULL TEXT

Headnote

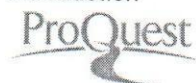
Abstract

This study, 'Influence of political advertising in Nigeria's 2015 Presidential election in Lagos state' examined the role political advertising played in the said election. The research questions of the study are: did political advertising messages alone influence voting decision of the electorates in the 2015 Presidential election? What other factors, besides political advertising, influenced voting decision in the 2015 Presidential election? What were voters' perceived intentions of political advertising messages in the 2015 Presidential election? What was the behavior of voters towards political advertising messages in the 2015 Presidential election? Information processing theory of William McGuire was used as the theoretical framework. Survey research method was applied and questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. Multistage sampling method was adopted and 400 copies of the instrument were distributed in five randomly selected local government areas of Lagos state. However, 396 were returned and four were deemed invalid. Therefore, 392 copies of the questionnaires, representing 98%, were analyzed.

The outcome showed that for almost half of the respondents (49%), political advertising was the sole factor that influenced their voting choice. For those who noted that this was not the case, other factors accounted for their choice, and three of these factors led the pack: ethnic considerations, religious beliefs and other considerations. The result also indicates that contrary to what analysis of political advertising studies showed during the said election, voters' perception of political advertising tilted towards the notion that it was intended to be issue-based rather than manipulative. In general, political advertising was more of a reinforcing stimulus as it acted more to affirm voters' already held positions than as an agent of voting behavior change.

Keywords: Political advertising; Election; Voting behavior; Influence; Nigeria

Introduction



Alawode and Adesanya [1] described political advertising as a form of campaign used by political candidates to reach and influence voters. It is a subset of advertising described by Arens [2] as a structured and composed non-personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products, services and ideas by identified sponsors, through various mass media.

In the context of Kayode [3], political advertising requires that mass communication be focused, targeted and managed when reaching out to large audience groups. It can include several different mediums and span several months over the course of a political campaign. Unlike the campaigns of the past, advances in media technology have streamlined the process, giving candidates more options to reach even larger groups of constituents with very little physical effort.

Political advertising has become a relevant niche of advertising in the contemporary political terrain of Nigeria. This is not unconnected with its usefulness as a veritable means of making the electorates aware of candidates and manifestoes of political parties [4]. Political advertising has become an integral part of politics in Nigeria to the extent that electorates sometimes weigh the seriousness of candidates and political parties against the background of the level and pattern of advertising employed. Underscoring the relevance of political advertising in the current Nigerian political dispensation, Alawode and Adesanya [1] noted that political advertising is central to the realization of effective political socialization and mobilization.

This re-echoes an earlier assertion by a former President of the United States of America, Richard Nixon that "political advertising is to politics what bumper stickers are to philosophy." It is not gainsaying that this assertion is relevant to current political practices in Nigeria. In Nigeria, advertising and public relations are the two most relevant of the promotional mix elements in political advertising. This was echoed by Ansolabehere and Iyenga [5] who argued that political advertising has become a veritable tool for selling candidates of political parties during campaigns. Similarly, Kaid [6] stressed that advertising messages do influence public perception of candidates. Nigeria runs a democratic system of electing public officers into elective posts. This gives many contestants ample avenue to make themselves available for public consideration. With over fifty political parties in Nigeria and the need to reach the people of diverse geographical and cultural peculiarities, many politicians and political parties are left with no other options than maximizing the strength of the mass media in reaching out to the people.

Consequently, persuasive messages are designed to highlight parties' manifestoes and showcase their candidates for the people to exercise their franchise in their favor. The tilt towards using the mass media for political communication might not be unconnected with the limitations of interpersonal communication in a diverse terrain like Nigeria. Thus, it is not gainsaying that in modern times, political advertising is one of the several ways politicians and political parties mobilize the electorates.

Political advertising can be done in several ways, such as television programme's, radio, newspapers and display of candidate's portraits, with several promising and persuasive inscription on the billboard, magazines and even the new media of communication. Part of the basic objectives of political advertising is to gain attention of the electorates and for this reason, political advertising sometimes involves orthodox strategies to achieve its aim. Edegoh, et al. [7] submitted that Nigeria witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number and style of political advertising in the national and state elections held in 2011. Several media of political advertising were employed during the electioneering campaigns. Notable of these media include radio, television, Internet, newspapers, magazines, billboards, posters and others. Despite the finances and experts services that politicians and political parties employ in designing persuasive messages and disseminating them via multiple media platforms, the influence of political advertising in shaping voters' attitude as well as directly influencing voting decision calls for empirical inquiry. Hence, the need for this study.

Statement of the Problem

Political advertising is fast becoming an important part of Nigerian politics. This was demonstrated at the 2011 and the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. It will be recalled that prior to the 2015 General Election, the All Progressives' Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the two major political parties that

presented contenders for the presidential election, as well as other political parties vehemently used political advertising. Political advertising messages were displayed on radio, television, newspapers, magazines, the internet and many outdoor platforms. This might not be unconnected with the assumed relevance of political advertising in influencing voting decisions. Indeed, Nigerian scholars among which include Ekhareafa, Akoseogasimhe and Olujide, et al. [8,9] have identified political advertising as a recognizable influencer of voters in Nigeria. It is also noteworthy that Batta, et al. [10] just like Alawode and Adesanya [1] have observed that political advertising was strongly used towards the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria. This study therefore seeks to probe into the roles (if any) political advertising played on voting decisions of the electorates during the election. The study is however delimited to the 2015 Presidential Election.

Research Objectives

The following are the objectives of this study:

- * To ascertain if political advertising alone influenced voting decision of the electorates in the 2015 Presidential election.
- * To investigate if other factors besides political advertising influenced voting decisions of the electorates in the 2015 Presidential election.
- * To establish voters' perceived intention(s) of political advertising in the 2015 Presidential election.
- * To examine the behaviour of the electorates towards political advertising messages in the 2015 Presidential election.

Research Questions

To accomplish the above stated objectives, the following questions were answered:

- * Did political advertising messages alone influence voting decision of the electorates in the 2015 Presidential election?
- * What other factors, besides political advertising, influenced voting decision in the 2015 Presidential election?
- * What were voters' perceived intentions of political advertising messages in the 2015 Presidential election?
- * What was the behaviour of voters towards political advertising messages in the 2015 Presidential election?

Literature Review

Political advertising in Nigerian politics

Advertising which is a branch of marketing communication has many branches. One of such branches which have become popular is political advertising. Politicians engage the service of different advertising agencies who creatively design messages geared towards engineering positive perception of electorates about their parties and candidates as well as their manifestoes. In a democracy, people champion the need for better leadership and parties express the ability to meet these needs in form of advertising and manifestoes; conferences, rallies from ward to ward, billboard, writings, granting and publishing interviews among others [7]. The essence of political advertising is not for the buyers- the electorates to just come and buy the product, but to appeal to their reasoning and emotions, in order to win votes [4]. Unlike what obtains in advertising that has to do with commercial products, in political advertising, the electorates do not have to buy the candidates, but come out to cast their votes, to top in the election and this is only done by eligible electorates within the constituency as political advertising is not targeted at every one, but those eligible.

Generally, advertising has to do with informing the people about the existence of something, so as to draw attention to it; it is giving of notice, so as to draw attention. Advertising is unique and special and if anything is to be known about the existence of a product, commodity, item, good, service or a political candidate, then there is need for advertising. Advertising describes any form of communication, which is principally aimed at promoting the sales and patronage of goods and services. Advertising as a purposive communication is both an act and art of communication. Individuals, corporate bodies and government endeavor to communicate their goods, products or services to the audience. It is noteworthy that the desired result from advertising of any kind is to influence consumer behaviour with respect to positive disposition to advertised products and services. Advertising messages are usually paid for by sponsors and viewed via various traditional media, including mass media such as

newspapers, magazines, television, radio, outdoor or direct mail or new media, such as websites and text messages.

As a special genre of advertising, Political advertising could be described as all efforts made by politicians, political parties, and parties' candidates to plan, design and disseminate messages intended to engender favorable attitude, perception and behaviour among the electorates which would in turn lead to the exercise of the electorates franchise in favor of the parties and their candidates. This means that political advertising is sponsored and therefore paid for by identified sponsors.

Asemah as cited by Edegoh et al. [7] submits that political advertising is used by Nigerian politicians to persuade people to vote for them and it is therefore part and parcel of the political process in Nigeria and any other democratic society. It is a very important source of communication for voters. It is the advertising that involves political parties presenting candidates in order to win votes and be in power. Considering the expectations from political advertising, it normally calls for strategic thinking and calculated initiative aimed at achieving desired results and it is purposive. Kogah [11] asserts that political advertising functions to communicate the attributes of the politician that relates to the constituent's needs and the candidate in turn gains the voter's confidence and votes. Here, the political candidate is packaged much like a commercial product, while the patronage of this 'political product' is measured by the number of votes garnered at the polls. As a result of the wide acceptability of political advertising in the contemporary political landscape in Nigeria, it is taken that modern politics is incomplete without political advertising [1].

Political advertising has immensely grown in Nigeria in the past two decades. Olujide et al. [9] note that advertising has become the most commonly used technique to create a favorable image for the candidate and a negative image for the opponent. Before now, political parties and candidates channeled most of their resources into political rallies, speeches and direct contact to gather the support of electorates [12]. Ansolabehere and Iyenger [5] identified two techniques used by political candidates and their parties for political advertising. They called them Attack Ad Techniques and Contrast Ad. However, Olujide, Adeyemi and Gbadeyan [9] mentioned a third technique referred to as political advertisements.

The Attack Ads Technique entails absolute focus on the negative perspective of the opposing parties. Such technique lacks any element of positivity about the opponents. The main aim of the advertisement is to ridicule, degrade and vilify the opposing parties. This often snowballs into personal attacks. Attack advertisements portray the opposing parties and their candidates as ill-equipped to solve societal needs. Also, messages are creatively designed to fault the manifestoes and ideology of the opposing parties by highlighting their weaknesses and impracticability. Often, the ad will simply make use of innuendo. According to Ansolabehere and Iyenger [5], attack ads usually identify the risk associated with the opponent. The ultimate goal of this ad is to create fear in the electorates and make them disenchanted with everything the opposition parties represent. For the sponsors of this type of advertisement, electioneering campaign is a battle for the souls of the electorates, and all it takes (including negative ads) must be provided to ensure victory at the polls.

Contrast ads contain information about both the sponsor (candidates or political parties) and opponents. However, the aspect that relate to the sponsor is positive while the information about the opponent is negative. Contrast ads compare and contrast the candidates with the opponent, juxtaposing the positive information about the candidate with the negative information of the opponent. Unlike the Attack ads technique that focuses on opponents negativities, Contrast ad focuses on the ideas, ideologies, manifestoes etc. of the sponsoring party and the opponents, but the message is designed as such that the sponsor's ideals are portrayed as more superior to the opponents. Political advertisements make no mention of the opposition parties and their candidates. Such advertising messages are designed around party of candidates that sponsor the campaign. The aim of such campaign might be to give the impression that the oppositions are not a force to reckon with. Also, such political message makes the electorates to be provided with relevant information about the sponsor-party without inundating them with information about opposing parties.

Mass media as platforms for political advertising in Nigeria

It is noteworthy that the multiplicity of mass media platforms provides diverse channels for churning out political adverts. These platforms are radio, television, newspaper, magazines, outdoors, the Internet and most recently the social media. It is observable that Nigerian political parties and their candidates select the media platforms through which they would put forward their political adverts based on the target audience. This is because there are demographic realities in media usage pattern among Nigerians. While the elderly ones rely largely on the mainstream media (radio, television, newspapers, and magazines), majority of the youths rely more on the internet, especially through social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

Commenting on the relevance of social media in modern practice of political advertising in Nigeria, Okoro and Nwafor [13] posited that the utilization of online networking in political issues has been developing of late even though it was not at first recognized as a political apparatus. But political aspirants and politicians at large have understood the capability of the social media site. Hence, it has turned into one of the fundamental platforms for political aspirants to propagate diverse campaign messages to their constituents who have an interest in their political career and aspirations. This position was supported by Chinedu-Okeken and Obi who observed that political mobilization is attainable through social media.

Okoro and Nwafor [13] reported that with social networking sites political aspirants appeal to citizens, allowing them to maintain constant touch with the electorates. This is because the internet has drastically reduced the barriers of space and time that could militate against active engagement of political advertising. Time here is as minute as the few seconds or minutes needed to compose and publish certain political messages. In their own perspective, David et al. and Kreiss [14,15] remarked that most political party and leader maintain an account on Facebook and Twitter in order to put out their agenda. Thus, the role of web-based social networking systems like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in electioneering campaign in Nigeria as of late can't be overemphasized [16].

Just like the use of social media platforms, it is also on record that newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations also served as platforms for political advertising as a build up to the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. Many of these adverts were sponsored by individual politicians, political parties, as well as party candidates. The two major contenders at the election- the then ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the main opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) explored multiple media platforms to convey their manifestoes to the electorates.

For instance, Ekhareafu and Akoseogasimhe [8] showed the extensive use of newspapers for political advertising in the 2015 Presidential election. Edegoh et al. [9] also gave insight into the use of the broadcast media (television) as a tool for political advertising. They noted that such adverts could influence voters' decision just as the combination of sound and visuals could aid more recall of political adverts messages. They, however, suggested combination of all media platforms as the balanced kit for effective political advertising.

Media persuasion and political advertising

The power of media to persuade people has been of major interest to media scholars and others. The body of research in mass communication regarding media influence on opinion and behaviour has moved through three recognizable paradigms of communication theory [17]. These paradigmatic shifts are the all-powerful effects, limited effects, and moderate effects. The all-powerful effects of media persuasion began with the work of Walter Lippmann and Harold Lasswell who viewed people as living in mass societies where they are passive and are greatly influenced by media messages [18]. However, Lowery and DeFleur [19] documented the studies of Hadley Cantril and Paul Lazarsfeld which challenged this view and proposed the limited media effects perspective. Moderate effects followed with evidence of media dependence, the power of media to silence opposing views, and violent media effect through long-term exposure [17].

Media effects arguments have also been analyzed using media messages during elections, with one of the earliest being Lazarsfeld's work on the persuasive power of media in the political process. Persuasive communication involves the sending of a message provided by one agent with at least a potential interest in changing the behaviour of another agent, otherwise known as the receiver.

Political advertising can either be positive or negative [20] or can be based on or information or persuasion [21].

Political advertising then is an arm of political communication since voters need to know about candidates, parties, and manifestoes. This need for information on the part of voters provides avenues for persuasion just as the aim of conventional advertising of goods is to induce a certain action. From this standpoint, political advertising can be linked to the larger debate on media influence.

But scholars have divergent evidences on the persuasive effect of political advertising. On the one hand, Spenkuch and Toniatti [22] in an analysis of Presidential elections in the United States from 2004 to 2012, found minimal effects of political advertising, arguing that partisan views were more potent especially considering that spending on political advertising and campaign by opposing candidates are more or less equal and tend to cancel each other [21]. DellaVigna and Gentzkow also found that political advertising had little effect on voting decision as opposed to face-to-face campaign which had a greater effect on voters.

On the other hand, Brandenburg and Van Egmond [23] found evidence of media persuasion in the UK elections of 2005. Questioning the limited effects perspective, they argued that media influence was substantial but difficult to detect, submitting that media coverage of parties during the election influenced how people perceived candidates, that negative coverage of other parties had a greater positive impact on how a party was perceived than direct positive coverage did, and this influence was greatest for those who were undecided.

Magee [24] also found that negative political advertisement was more potent at persuading voters than positive advertisement. His finding supported the theory which holds that an incumbent candidate will spend more on negative advertisement when he is faced with a serious challenger but will invest in positive advertisement when faced with a light challenger. This shows why political parties and candidates continue to spend on advertisements in spite of what media scholars say of media persuasion.

The electorate also views the media as powerful as opposed to what research studies say. Mutz [25] observed that this divide exists, noting that while scholars have followed the output of research work from the all-powerful paradigm to the present time, people have measured the power of media during elections based on ubiquity, the fact that the people equate product advertising to political advertising, and the fact that political candidates continue to invest huge sums - around 70% of their budget - for media consultancy and political advertising justify the use of political advertising messages to influence voters.

Linking political advertising to voting behaviour in Nigeria

The last general elections in Nigeria were held in 2015 and some studies [8,10,26] have been conducted to analyze the features of political advertisements used by the two major parties that contested the election and the influence that this had on the electorate. The summary of their works suggests that political advertisements during elections in Nigeria are largely negative with little emphasis on issues, and that political adverts have little influence on voting behaviour.

The first two studies were based on examining the features of political adverts during the election and arrived at strikingly similar outcomes. First were Ekhareafu and Akoseogasimhe [8] which was preoccupied with finding out the features of political and campaign adverts during the 2015 election focusing on the two major parties that contested the election? The researchers looked at eight purposively selected adverts from two Nigerian newspapers from January to March 2015, focusing on the wordings, themes, subject matter, interpretation and pictures used in the adverts.

In their textual review of the adverts, they noted that the political adverts were overshadowed by negative tactics, inflammation and personal attacks. One in particular was adjudged insulting. Only few adverts were issue-based and some of the adverts had religious undertones. They also observed that the advert contravened the provisions of the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) Code as it relates to political advertising as one advert "grossly made use of hate speeches, attack, accusatory, religious prejudice and ethnic sentiment".

The second study in this set, which was carried out by Batta et al. [10], focused on the features of political adverts used during the 2015 general elections. To ascertain this, the researchers' content analyzed adverts in *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers from January to March 2015. They found that most of the adverts were not issue-based (63%), with most of them being personal attacks (41%), followed by religious sentiments, ethnic prejudice

and hate speech. They also found that non-political actors were the greatest sponsors of political advertising, followed by the two major parties: PDP and APC in that order; and one-third of the adverts did not comply with the APCON code.

Ojekwe [26] went beyond studying the features of political adverts during the election into analyzing the influence that they had on voters. She was interested in knowing how the political advertising campaign of Akinwunmi Ambode who was the gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressives Congress in Lagos state influenced voting decision. To this end, she studied 200 respondents and found that only a fraction of the respondents was influenced by the adverts.

However, electronic advertising on radio and television was found to be potent as most respondents remembered Ambode's theme song. She submitted that electoral victory was determined by other factors separate from political advertising. Our study extends the literature by examining not a gubernatorial election as in Ojekwe's case, but the 2015 Presidential election, and not just the features of adverts in the Presidential election as in Batta et al.'s [10] case, but the influence of the adverts on voting behaviour.

Theoretical Framework: Information Processing Theory

The information processing theory was developed by William McGuire as a cognitive and systematic way of analyzing information leading to attitude change. Anaeto, et al. [27] noted that the theory lays out a process of cognitive assessment with one leading to the other and that McGuire has added more stages to information processing ladder.

In 1989, McGuire presented twelve steps in information processing ranging from exposure, comprehension, retention, retrieval, decision, behaviour, to reinforcement [27]. Baran and Davis [18] describe the theory as computerizing and reductionist. They assert that it equates humans with computers possessing the ability to screen sensory information, filtering in only a small percentage of information they are exposed to and remembering only a minute fraction. This is done almost unconsciously with humans having little power over information processing.

One foundational assumption of information processing is that humans are exposed daily to more messages than they can deal with. Hence, when they come in contact with new information, they need a basis on which to evaluate it.

This explains why people who have prior knowledge tend to evaluate brands favorably using information processing, while others who lack it are only able to process information when they spend considerable time assessing brands to make up for their lack of sufficient knowledge [28]. This is in tandem with DellaVigna and Gentzkow where people with superior knowledge tend to be open to persuasive communication when it comes in the form of information and not manipulation.

Palomo, et al. [29] applied systematic-heuristic approach to purchase decision of consumers in Spain based on social and environmental labeling. They found that more consumers tend to make decisions based on brand recognition as opposed to processing information based on recognizing, understanding, trusting, and considering useful social and environmental labeling.

The implication therefore is that people make product choices not on systematic grounds of information processing. Extending information processing to how Americans evaluate black leaders, Carton and Rosette [30] upheld this notion and provided a how and why approach to the fact that Americans use goal-based stereotypes in their evaluation of the successes or failures of black leaders.

It would seem that this pattern also finds expression in the realm of political advertising. That is, those who hold partisan views make voting decisions based on prejudices and not actual information processing. For example, Franz and Ridout [31] observed that the influence of political advertising is moderated by high exposure to information with those having little exposure being the most susceptible to political persuasion through advertising.

Greene [32] however distinguished between the processing-partisan approach in advanced and developing countries. He noted that people react to great exposure to political messages in two ways. First is according to

their existing store of information and the less of this that voters have, the more they are susceptible to changing their minds in an unbalanced information environment.

Second is that voters evaluate political messages based on partisan bias such that those who do not have this bias evaluate messages on opposing candidates in an independent manner, while those who hold this bias evaluate messages based on their pre-existing notion?

In a place like the United States of America for instance, voters have a huge store of political information, making it possible for them to hold partisan views such that campaigns and adverts have little influence on them. But in developing countries where different parties constantly rise and fall and where people have a reduced information store and less political leanings, advertising can have a significant influence on voters [32].

It is with this in mind that we set out to examine if political advertising alone do influenced voting decision of the electorates or not. We also set out to decipher electorates' knowledge of the intention of political advertising as well as the behaviour of electorates' viz-a-viz political advertising messages. The study is however delimited to the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria.

Research Method

The study adopted survey research method, while questionnaire was used as data collection instrument. The study was conducted in Lagos state because the state is a melting point of ethnic groups in the country, representing a kind of mini-Nigeria. Aside being the most populated state in Nigeria, the state is also the economic base of the nation. The state has 20 federally recognized Local Government Areas (LGAs) and 37 Local Council Development Areas (LCDAs) created by the state government. According to the Lagos Bureau of Statistics [33], there are 17,552,942 residents in Lagos state.

Multi-stage sampling technique was used to draw samples. The first stage was the selection of five LGAs using the simple random sampling technique. To this end, Surulere LGA, Mushin LGA, Ikeja LGA, Lagos Mainland LGA and Shomolu LGA were selected. The second stage was the selection of four wards from each LGAs using the simple random sampling technique. Four wards per LGA meant that 20 wards were used in the five LGAs. Afterwards, four streets were selected from each ward using simple random sampling, and five households were selected from each street using the systematic random sampling technique. The final stage was the selection of one person from each household using the stratified sampling technique. The stratification variables used were: Level of education (minimum is Secondary School Certificate Examination [SSCE]), awareness of political advertising messages and the person must have voted during the 2015 Presidential election. In all, 400 copies of the research instrument were administered, 396 were returned, and 392 were considered valid. The 392 valid responses represent a 98 percent response rate.

For research question one, the variable measured was whether political advertising alone accounted for voting choice, and the response was drawn using a yes/no frame. This was however supported with other items measuring the rate of awareness to political advertising, extent of exposure, party campaign message most exposed to and party alignment.

For research question two, the variable measured was other factors responsible for voter choice and the measurement was done on a scale of 1 (weakest factor) to 5 (strongest factor). Research questions three and four were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

The instrument used for the study was validated using face validity and a measure of internal consistency. In particular, the items used to answer research question one were validated using face validity, while the items for research questions two to four were subjected to Cronbach's alpha test of reliability.

The outcome of the test showed an alpha of .66 for the six items used in answering research two, .68 for the seven items used for research question three, and .69 for the items for research question four. These indices showed that the instrument was reliable, particularly when we consider their proximity to the .7 margin.

Scope of the Study

The study covered residents of Lagos state only. The study was predicated on ascertaining how political advertising influenced voting decisions of the electorates in the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria. The study

also explored the extent of awareness of the intention of political advertising messages as well as established the knowledge of the electorates of political advertising in the said election.

Result

In general, the demographic data, measured in the form of gender, occupation, age, marital status and education, showed that respondents were evenly spread across all categories (Table 1).

Answers to Research Questions

Research question 1: Did political advertising messages alone influence voting decision of the electorates in the 2015 Presidential election?

Research question one was aimed at knowing whether or not political advertising alone was responsible for the choice of voters during the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria. Findings indicate that political advertising was not the only factor that influenced voters' choice during the election. However, as a single factor, to a relatively large extent, it influenced voters' choice during the election.

According to the data in Table 2, almost half (49%) of the respondents noted that political advertising was the sole factor responsible for their choice in the election. This number is considered high because it is enough to determine the direction of the election. Also, those who answered in the negative were not stating that political advertising did not influence them, but were rather of the view that it was not the sole deciding factor for them. This is related to findings in Table 3 where it is evident that majority of the respondents were highly exposed to political advertising. In all, two out of every five (42.1%) of the respondents were very highly aware of political advertising, while one in five (21.4%) were highly aware.

When combined, this shows that almost two-thirds (63.5%) were either highly or very highly aware of political advertising during the election. On the other hand, only 11.2% of the respondents were aware, either lowly or very lowly of political advertising. This high rate of awareness probably explains why for a sizable number of the respondents, political advertising alone was enough to influence their voting choice during the election.

This pattern was also recorded in Table 4 where we see a high rate of exposure to political advertising. Over half (56.4%) of the respondents were exposed to political advertising on a daily basis. On the other hand, 34.2% were exposed 2-4 days every week, while 9.4% were exposed 5-6 days a week. The consistent exposure to political advertising over a sustained period of time for which the campaign lasted might also explain why political advertising alone influenced voting choice for nearly half of the respondents (Table 2).

To understand how political advertising had such an influence on the respondents' voting choice, we measured the campaign messages that they were exposed to according to political party and the party that the respondent eventually aligned with. The outcome was presented in Table 5 where we see that well over two-thirds (72.2%) of the respondents noted that they were exposed the most to the campaign messages of the All Progressives' Congress, the party that won the election. Going by this, we can infer that one reason why the APC won the election was because political advertising played a recognizable role in influencing voting choice and since most of the respondents were exposed to APC campaign messages, the party was set up to win the election.

This pattern was also noticed in the party that the respondents eventually aligned with. Table 5 shows that 58.4% of the respondents chose to align with the APC, while 36% went with the People's Democratic Party. Although the figure for the APC in this category is lower than the 72.2% recorded for exposure, it more closely represents the 53.96% of people who voted for President Muhammadu Buhari, the candidate of the APC.

Research question 2: What other factors, besides political advertising, influenced voting decision in the 2015 presidential election?

For research question two, our preoccupation was to ascertain other factors apart from political advertising that were responsible for voting choice since 51% of the respondents noted that political advertising was not the sole factor that influenced their choice. Findings in Table 6 showed the factors. The items listed in the table were provided by the researchers after extensive study and vetting and the respondents were required to choose on a scale of 1 (weakest) to 5 (strongest), the other factors that affected their voting choice.

The outcome in Table 6 showed that "Ethnic considerations" with a mean of 3.37 and standard deviation of 1.54

was the most prominent factor besides political advertising that influenced voter choice during the election. This outcome was not considered strange. In Nigeria, as in other sub-Saharan African nations, ethnicity still plays a part in who people choose to vote for. President Muhammadu Buhari is Hausa/ Fulani from the North, while his opponent, President Goodluck Jonathan is Ijaw from the South. The ethnic card in the election showed as Jonathan won overwhelmingly in the South-South and South-East regions, places where he was considered a "son" or a "brother." Buhari, on the other hand, got most of his votes from the North where he too was considered a "son" or a "brother".

Related to this is the role of religion as seen in Table 6 where "Religious beliefs" ranked second with mean of 3.33 and standard deviation of 1.49. As was noticed in the election, the Jonathan camp painted Buhari as an Islamic fundamentalist whose agenda was to make Nigeria a Muslim country. This religious dichotomy reflects ethnic differences as the North is predominantly Islam, while the South is predominantly Christian. The ratings of other factors, apart from political advertising, that influence voting choice during the election were "Other consideration" (M=3.16, SD=1.42), "Personality of candidates" (M=2.94, SD=1.35), "Party manifestoes" (M=2.87, SD=1.55), and "Party affiliation" (M=2.81, SD=1.29). One sample t-test however showed that political affiliation with a t value of -2.187, religious beliefs with t value of 3.319, and ethnic considerations with t value of 3.686 were statistically significantly different from the central value of 3 which represented the population mean. But party manifesto with t value of -.132, personality of candidates with t value of -.681, and other considerations with t value of 1.056 showed no statistical difference from the chosen population mean of 3, since they had $p > .05$, indicating that more than the first three items, they were representative of the population.

Research question 3: What were voters' perceived intentions of political advertising messages in the 2015 Presidential election?

For research question three, we sought to ascertain respondents' perception of the intent behind political advertising messages during the 2015 Presidential electioneering. We sought to provide an explanation of the view that people had regarding the aim of political advertising. Again, the items used for this variable were selected after study and vetting by the researchers. The findings as presented in Table 7 showed that respondents perceived that the most prominent intent behind political advertising was to solicit for votes (M=3.69, SD=1.25). This was expected since the reason why candidates throw their hats into a ring during electoral contests is to win elections by gathering the most votes.

Excluding the top-ranking item, we divided the remaining items into: issues-based and manipulation. Generally, the outcome indicated that respondents perceived political advertising to be more issue-based than manipulative. For instance, the second ranked item which belonged to the issue-based category was "to make job creation a major subject" (M=3.63, SD=1.25).

This indicates that to a large degree, respondents perceived that political advertising was intended to make job creation a deciding factor. The importance of this item becomes apparent when we consider that "soliciting votes" is the generic reason for political advertising. Ranking third was the respondents' perception that political advertising during the election was more issue-based than otherwise (M=3.37, SD=1.13), and ranking fifth was the perception that it "made insecurity a major subject" (M=3.29, SD=1.4).

On the other hand were the items that indicated that political advertising was aimed at manipulating people by playing on their emotions and beliefs. In general, these items ranked lower than those related to debating issues and ideas. The highest item in the "manipulation" divide, according to the perception of respondents, was that political advertising was "aimed at attacking opponents" (M=3.3, SD=1.29), making it fourth in the general ranking. This was followed by the perception that it was "aimed at evoking ethnic sentiments" which ranked sixth (M=3.15, SD=1.31), and lastly by the perception that it "was intended to spread hate speech" which ranked seventh (M=2.79, SD=1.32). Although the manipulative variable ranked lower, it is instructive to note that they all approximately ranked above average.

Research question 4: What influence did political advertising have on voting behaviour during the 2015 presidential election?

For research question, our purpose was to ascertain the pattern of behaviour that political advertising triggered in voters and the respondents gave their answers to items selected after the researchers' vetting on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. According to findings in Table 8, the top two ranking items indicate that political advertising was strongest in terms of reinforcing the choices that the voters already had. For instance, the top-ranking item was that political advertising triggered in voters actions aimed at "campaigning for the candidate they supported" ($M=3.2$, $SD=1.36$). This was followed by the item, "I had a candidate to vote for but political advertising reinforced my choice" ($M=3.16$, $SD=1.37$).

The next three items indicated the power of political advertising in attitude change by making voters shift from an earlier held position. We see this in the third ranking item, "I didn't want to vote but political made me change my mind" which had a mean of 2.77 and standard deviation of 1.36. This was followed by the fourth ranking item, "I wouldn't have vote for the candidate I voted for if not for political advertising" with a mean of 2.74 and standard deviation of 1.44. And then the fifth ranking item, "I had a candidate to vote for but political advertising made me change my mind" with a mean of 2.64 and standard deviation of 1.36.

The least ranking items in Table 8 were based on ethnic and religious considerations and aligned to a reasonable extent with the manipulative variables which ranked lower in Table 7. And so in Table 8, we see that the item, "political advertising made me vote based on ethnicity" ranked sixth ($M=2.38$, $SD=1.28$), while the item, "political advertising made me vote based on religion" ranked least ($M=2.34$, 1.32).

Discussion and Conclusion

The study was aimed at ascertaining how political advertising influenced voters during the 2015 Presidential election in Nigeria. Findings in the study revealed that a sizeable number of respondents noted that political advertising alone accounted for the voting choice. And for other factors besides political advertising that affect voting choice, ethnic considerations and religious beliefs were the most prominent factors. Also, the items that featured uppermost as the perceived intentions that the respondents had of political advertising were that it was aimed at soliciting votes, at making job creation a major subject, and that it was issue-based. For voting behaviour, we found that political advertising reinforced existing political beliefs more than it was disruptive.

This study agrees substantially with the view that political advertising is a recognizable influencer of voters [8,9], since we found that for almost half of the respondents, political advertising alone shaped their voting choice. The outcome of research question four however revealed that this influence is more related to reinforcing existing political views than attitude change.

However, with the reasonable high level of exposure to political advertising and the response of the respondents regarding their perceived intentions of political advertising, we submit that they have little knowledge of messages behind political advertising. The ranking of their responses showed that they perceived political advertising messages to be more issue-based than manipulative. But this is contrary to the content analysis of political adverts during the election which showed that most of them were manipulative, while only few were issue-based [8,9] and that most of the adverts, more than being sensational, also contravened the APCON code [10]. This faulty understanding of the rationale behind political advertising messages probably underscores why the electorates could have been vulnerable to manipulation based on political advertising in their information processing systems as explained by DellaVigna and Gentzkow.

But there is little to support this assertion since political advertising served to reinforce the voting choice of the people more than it did to change their voting behaviour. In this regard, this study agrees with other studies [22,26] which noted that political advertising has minimal effects on voters. Thus, we disagree with Brandenburg and Van Egmond [23] who found to a considerable degree, elements of political advertising persuasion in the 2005 UK elections. With regards to Greene [32], we agree with the difference pointed out between developed and developing countries. Considering the unstable nature of democracy in developing countries with different parties rising and falling every other year and the very popular practice of cross-carpeting, one would expect that the electorate would have little political affiliation, unlike what obtains in advanced democracies. Since they hold little or no political affiliation, then they tend to be influenced by political advertising [32]. Our finding of reinforcement over

influence however debunks this assertion, since the outcome indicates that the people who already had a choice and only used political advertising to reinforce their choice were more than those who used political advertising as an instrument of voting behaviour change. Notwithstanding, the items related to attitude change ranked between 2 and 3 on a 5-point scale, indicating some form of influence, though subdued. This probably accounts for why almost half of the respondents noted that political advertising alone influenced their voting choice.

Sidebar

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DETAILS

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