

Revisiting political advertising campaign strategies in the april 2007 gubernatorial election in lagos state

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Abstract

Throughout history, politicians have used various methods, such as speeches, political advertising and political rallies, to achieve their 'primary goal, the winning of votes'. However, over the years, politicians have found that it is most advantageous to use political communication to persuade voters. This study examined the influence of political advertising in the electoral process in Nigeria. The gubernatorial elections in Lagos state witnessed one of the heaviest use of political advertisements campaign, rallies and debates by political candidates. The influence of political advertising during election campaign periods has been said to be very significant. Thus, this study measured the degree to which political advertising influences voting during election. In a way of objectivity in this study, survey method was adopted to measure the influence of political advertising on the voting choice of the electorates. Two hundred samples from four different local government areas LGA in Lagos state i.e. Ikeja, Surulere, Alimosho and Lagos Island were scientifically selected. The study found out that political advertising influenced the voting choice of the electorates as most of the respondents opined that the political advertisements informed them about the candidate they voted for. Furthermore, other factors such as the educational background, gender, and tribe of the political candidates also played a significant role in their voting decision.

Keywords: Political advertising, Electioneering, Electorates, Candidates, Campaigns

Accepted on 16 April, 2021

Introduction

Advertising brings three steps together, in an effort first to inform, second to create a preference in the consumer's mind for a particular brand and lastly clinches the deal stimulates an action. Advertising as a communication process, has been able to influence consumer's decision-making process. It informs, creates preference and stimulates an action. Contemporary political advertising can be seen as an important means of informing citizen about who is standing, and what they are offering the citizen in political terms.

The perceived success of advertising in post war consumer capitalism made possible by the advent of mass television, led directly to the hypothesis that such strategies of persuasion could be applied to the political process. Advertising executives Ross Reeves inventor of the marketing concept of the Unique Selling Proposition pioneered the view that if commercial "spots" could sell products, they could sell politicians too.

Nigeria, as a democratic state has also engaged in several political campaign and it has been the bedrock of party politics and political activities in the country since her attainment of independence in that year, different party systems have emerged. It was observed that during the first republic, the country was split into three geopolitical regions which include Western Region, Eastern Region and Northern Region; and each political party took on the identities and ideologies of each region. The Northern People's Congress represented the interests of the predominantly Hausa/Fulani Northern Region, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons represented

the predominantly Igbo Eastern Region, and the Action Group dominated the Yoruba Western Region. For instance, all the political campaign of Political candidates like Alhaji Tafawa Balewa of the Northern People's Congress was upholding the principles and ideologies of the Northern region. Also, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens made his political campaign based on the Igbo ideologies of a strong will to rule the country. While the Action Group political campaign was based on the principle of the Yoruba ideology, the party had prominent Yoruba leaders like Chief Obafemi Awolowo who was its presidential candidate in the first republic and Chief S. L. Akintola as the premier of the Western region.

In the bungled third republic, the pendulum changed as the country witnessed of emergence of a two-party system, following of the sudden cancellation of the eleven political association formed by the politicians. The Babangida military government imposed two political parties, which includes the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention on the country.

The Social Democratic Party presidential candidate was the Late Chief MKO Abiola who had a political campaign based on eradicating poverty in Nigeria, creation of wealth in the country and tackling the nation's foreign debt. Chief Abiola focused on those personal capacities of ruling the country. He campaigned on giving hope t the masses.

Following the collapse of the third republic and the emergence of Abacha's military regime. The following political parties were registered the United Nigeria Congress Party, the Democratic Party of Nigeria, the National Centre Party of

Nigeria, the Grassroot Democratic Movement and the congress for National Consensus. But Abacha's sudden death led to the dissolution of the these five political parties by a new regime headed by Abdulsalami Abubakar who put in place a new political transition programme that was scheduled to terminate.

The Abdulsalami military government ushered in the fourth republic when he endorsed the transition to civil rule government and went further to register the multi-party system. The three parties out of nine political associations that contested the local government elections in December. These were the Peoples Democratic Party, All Peoples Party, Alliance for Democracy. These three parties contested the gubernatorial, National Assembly, and the presidential elections, meant the usher in a new civilian government.

The most dominant political party was the People Democratic Party during the elections, wining the majority seats in local councils, state and national assemblies, also wining governorship elections in 21 states of the federation. While the two others, All Peoples Party and Alliance for Democracy could not meet up with the victory.

During the short period of electioneering campaign, there were few negative political advertising from both political candidates, that is, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and Chief Olu Falae. For instance, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the political candidate of the People's Democratic Party accused Chief Olu Falae of supporting the Structural Adjustment Programme in the mid 80s [1].

Since the All Peoples Party and the Alliance for Democracy individually could not enjoy national support, they formed an alliance to produce a joint presidential candidate, Chief Olu Falae under the platform of the APP failed as the presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was declared by INEC as the convincing winner.

Political Campaigns in Nigeria

The new democratic government under the auspices of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was a necessity due to the demand and quest from the people so as to end the military regime in the country. The democratic government of President Olusegun Obasanjo, who was re-elected for another tenure of four years, did not really give room for more participation by other politicians since the people saw that no other person fit for the position that the incumbent, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo.

With the demise of the Third Term Agenda, the various political parties, had enough time to mount massive political campaigns ranging from political rallies, speech, debates, television advertising, radio jingles, print adverts etc.

In an examination of the gubernatorial election campaign in Lagos, the researcher observed that most of the political parties like the Action Congress now Action Congress of Nigeria, Alliance for Democracy, All Progressive Grand Alliance, Democratic Peoples' Alliance, Fresh Democratic Party, Labour Party made effective use of different political advertisements of their flag bearers.

However, the electioneering period was characterized by negative political advertising most especially between the contending political parties the Action Congress and the People's Democratic Party. For instance, the Action Congress signed political advert that showed some people trying to put out the fire that gutted when Musiliu Obanikoro, the gubernatorial candidate of the People's Democratic Party, was Chairman of Lagos Island Council. The headline piece reads Beware of Fire.

The extensive use of political advertising during the gubernatorial election was said to have made an impact in the political terrain and the economy, as most political parties spent millions of naira to make their political candidates known and acceptable to the electorate.

Problem Statement

This study examined the influence of political advertising on the election of political candidates in Nigeria. Jeff Konter explains that "political advertisements are extensively used by political candidates as a measure for projecting the key points of their manifesto, promises and political ideology [2].

The use of political advertising during election campaign times has been described as negative and image blunder between the political opponents. This researcher has observed that most political candidates only use such means of tarnishing the personality of their opponents instead of stating facts to enhance their chances of winning at the polls. Political advertising has been very useful in communicating the goals and policies of a political candidate to the electorate.

An examination of the gubernatorial elections in Lagos, share that all the political candidates extensively employed different political strategies and tactics including political advertising, to sell themselves to the people.

However, in the history of political advertising in developed countries like the United States of America, literature revealed that political advertising has contributed to the success of electing the political candidate by the electorate. Ginsberg states that "political advertisements attempts to establish candidates name, identification, creates a favourable image of the candidate and a negative image of the opponent, link and communicate of candidates stands on selected issues" [3].

In addition, this study examined the factors that influence voters choices of political candidates based on political candidate, his/her polices, goals and manifesto and no other factors such as ethnicity, level of education or personal biases during gubernatorial elections in Lagos State will be used as a case study.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of political advertising on the election of political candidates at the polls.

To determine whether more political advertisements utilized by the political candidates determines his or her election at the polls.

To examine the political campaigns and advertising in congruence with the election of the political candidates during the gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.

To examine the effectiveness of political advertising in determining the voters' choice at the polls.

To examine the relationship that exist between the content of political advertisements and the electorates' perception of the image of the political candidate.

Methodology

The survey method was adopted in gathering the relevant data to address the research questions of the study. The study aimed at finding out the relationship among the key variables of the study vis-à-vis qualitative content of political advertising, exposure to political advertisement and voting choice of the electorate.

The population of study was people of voting age resident in Lagos. The gubernatorial election that took place in Lagos State formed the basis of using Lagos State as the population of study. Four local government areas in Lagos State were sampled in this study and a total number of two hundred (200) people in the four Local Government Areas in Lagos State.

These respondents represented the sample size for the study and 50 copies of questionnaires were administered to 50 people in each of the four Local Government Areas.

Table 1. Are the electorate persuaded by the political advertisement they read/see/hear in the media.

Response	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	90	56.25
No	70	43.75
Total	(160)	100

From the Table 1, about 90 (56%) of the respondents were persuaded by the political advertisements they see/hear/read in the media while about 70 (43%) were not persuaded by these political advertisements.

Table 2. Is the voting choice of the political candidates by the electorate influenced by their exposure to the political advertisement.

Response	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	136	85
No	24	15
Total	(160)	100

The Table 2 shows that 85% of the respondents that voted were influenced by the political advertisements of the political

candidate, while 15% constitute those that were not influenced by their political advertisement.

Table 3. Respondents' perception of the content of political advertisements and the image of the political candidate.

Response	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Refined	48	30
Destroying	2	1.25
Attack	4	2.5
Propaganda	100	62.5
None	6	3.75
Total	(160)	100

About 100 (62%) of the respondents perceive the content of every political advertising as propaganda, 48 (30%) perceives it as refined, while 6 (3.75%) and 4 (2.5%) see it as an attack, were indifferent about the content of the political advertisement (Table 3).

Table 4. Respondents' view of the importance of political advertisement during electioneering period.

Response	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	136	85
No	24	15
Total	(160)	100

From the Table 4, 85% of the respondents are of the opinion that political advertising is very important during the electioneering period while 15% of the respondents believe that political advertising is not important during electioneering period.

Table 5. Respondents view of the relevance of political advertising in political campaigns.

Response	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	124	77.5
No	36	22.5
Total	(160)	100

The Table 5 shows that 124 (77.5%) of the respondents wants political candidates to utilize more of political advertising while 36 (22.5%) said they should not utilize it (Table 6).

Table 6. What other factors, apart from political advertisements influenced the voting choice of the electorate.

Response	No of respondents	Percentage (%)
Age	0	0
Gender	38	23.75
Tribe	2	1.25
Educational level	111	69.37
None	9	5.62

Total	(160)	100
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The findings from the Table 6 reveals that there are other factors such as the educational background, gender and tribe may influence the electorates' voting choice at the polls. The educational level of the political candidate is about 11 (69%), while gender at 38 (23%) is another influencing factor to the electorate at the poll [4].

Discussion of Findings

This study discovered that political advertising determines the election of political candidates at the polls. About 96 (60%) of the respondents agreed that political advertising somehow determines the election of the political candidate at the polls while 64 (40%) of the respondent said it does not actually determine their winning chances at the polls.

In addition, during political campaigns, the electorate assesses each political candidate based on their personal attributes and subjective estimation in which they try to evaluate that person to actually have that attribute before finally voting for that person.

To support the views of which states that "the mass media play a significant role and constitute a major influence of the outcome of the aspects of the political process". This study found out that the mass media played a significant role during the April 2007 gubernatorial election. The media first exposed all the advertisement sponsored by the political candidates and by this action, the electorate gets to know the political candidates standing for a particular position and the political party they represent [5-7].

In addition to the above, the media debates on television also sets an agenda for public discuss as the electorate gets to process the information from such debates before taking a voting choice.

Finally, the two underlying assumptions stated in this study first, that the electorates are very active in the information they process, second that the mass media also help the electorate to process the information they receive is however, supported with the findings of this study that the electorates process the information the media disseminates before taking an action; and the media helps in informing, enlightening and educating the electorates about the political candidates during electioneering period through the political advertisements they disseminate to the electorates.

Recommendation

On the overall, the findings of this study revealed that political advertising is important strategy utilized during election by political candidates in Nigeria. It found out that political advertising actually has influence on the voting choice of the electorates during an election [8-13].

In addition, it showed that majority of the voters were male who were politically conscious than their female counterparts. While voters between the age brackets of 18-25 participated

more in the Gubernatorial elections in the four local government areas sampled in Lagos state. In addition, students and university degree holders also represented voters with high political participation in the Gubernatorial elections [14-17].

However, this study revealed that most of the voters were influenced by the political advertisement of the political candidates. This study also explained that other factors such as the educational background and gender of the political candidate plays an important role in influencing the voting choice of the electorate.

In summary, the influence of political advertising during the last gubernatorial elections in Lagos could be measured by 85,136 out of the total 160 respondents sampled in the four local government areas in the state. This is due to their exposure to the political advertisement in the media [18-22].

Conclusion

This study concludes that political advertising influences the electorates' voting decision and behaviour in terms of providing information, changing perception on believability of political messages and attitudes toward both the sponsor and the message during electioneering period. Based on the significant findings made in the course of this investigation, several conclusions can be drawn. There is no doubt that political communication is an essential part of the democratic process in the modern world. It is one means by which political parties and candidates for elections communicate directly or indirectly with the electorate.

However, this study found out that political advertising has great influence on the voting choice of the electorate. More so, their exposure to the media messages has also contributed to the fact that the media also helps to inform the electorate about political issues, candidates and events in order to make rational decisions. This study also found out that political advertising is very important in the electioneering period as respondents are of the opinion that it helps to inform, educate and enlighten the electorate about the political candidates contesting the election before they go to the polls.

From the foregoing, it could be conclusive to sum up that political advertising has a significant role in influencing the voters' choice, which results in the election of political candidates in an election. Political advertising has been described as an important tool of the political and electoral process. Therefore, for political advertising to be successful in a developing country like Nigeria, ethical and legal considerations must be strictly adhered to. Past research findings explain that negative political advertising could jeopardize a democratic system of a developing country especially when disagreements between political candidates go beyond the conventional issues.

Since the Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria APCON has set code ethics in political advertising, it is therefore mandatory for political parties, campaign organizations, advertising agencies and political candidates to adhere strictly to these set of rules.

The media has been very instrumental in the education and information of political activities to the electorate, thus, it should also help to promote good course in the political education since they are agenda setters in the society. The Media should ensure that the political campaign should address important issues to which the electorates could consider as a strong point for making a voting choice.

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