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## **The Tradition of Marketing Nigeria Politicians through Visual Media**

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### **Abstract**

*Before Nigerian independence in 1960, all political campaigns and debates were limited by the colonial masters to outdoor rallies, soap box speeches, but sometimes there were press editorial efforts in the tabloids and broadsheets; the broadcast media were, however, not allowed for political marketing. By 1963, after independence, all media of communication were systematically introduced during rallies to send campaign messages to the electorate. This study focuses on the visual media used during political campaigns in Nigeria since the year 1963. Data for the study were collected from secondary sources such as books, journals, newspapers, magazines and the internet. Replicable and valid inferences were made before synthesizing and analyzing the contents of these materials, using descriptive method. It is discovered that the visual media used by visual artists in marketing*

*politicians through advertising agencies are signage that include theme/above-the-line media (print and electronic-television), scheme/below-the-line media (posters, leaflets, stickers and calendars, among others), outdoor/transit media (transportation/vehicle branding and billboard advertising) and ephemeral media (body painting, callisthenic display and sky writing). The researcher concludes that the visual concepts adopted by visual artists to market Nigerian politicians have successfully educated the entire citizenry on the democratic process. This is the only area in which they have contributed their quota to building a politically stable country with a good creative tradition.*

**Key words:** Political campaigns, Political marketing, Campaign messages, Visual artists, Nigerian politicians

### **Introduction**

Since 1960 after political independence from the colonialists, electing people into political offices every four years has become the most exciting and deliberate political activity for the great majority of Nigerians. The reason for this political tradition is not far-fetched. A nation like Nigeria that is so pluralistic and heterogeneous in culture, race, geography, religion and origin needs a unifying political leadership. Consciously or unconsciously, voters respond to this political imperative, although the general conduct during political campaigns lies behind the do or die games, the wit and gossip and name calling that have become part and parcel of Nigeria political system.

Nigerian electioneering campaign into seats at the local, state and national levels is a protracted drama in several ways, each with its special tension and climax. The battle lines are first drawn within the parties. During nomination phase, which is the most significant in political race the party executives at the national level leave the political arena to individual aspirants, who seek nomination votes in primary elections and national conventions.

The only effective and efficient way of passing political messages from the aspirants, who are successful at the primaries and the conventions, to the electorate is through the means of communication, which is the process of transferring information to people by usage of languages and visual images. This due process was not followed strictly during the pre independent Nigeria when all political campaigns and debates were excluded to outdoor rallies, soap box speeches, and press editorials in the tabloid and broadsheets, but

today it is assumed that all media of communication (visual images inclusive) have been systematically introduced during political rallies to send campaign messages to the electorate and the visual artists have become active stakeholders in the business of packaging Nigerian politicians like commodities.

Forman's (1985) book on political advertising supports the latter assumption when he says that: *For better or worse, we live in an age that is characterized by the widespread use of various channels of communication (including political advertising media) for a broad range of political and other purposes. Politicians need the media and seek to use them... Equally, those who work in the media (including political advertising practitioners) are not too shy to exert the significant influence of visual images over the political process, which they can sometimes wield.*

Forman's assertion on the usage of all channels of communication highlights the significant role of political advertising media in marketing politicians. Among the myriads of communication channels discussed in his thesis visual media stand out as a potential political advertising medium that is popular in the business of marketing politicians in different parts of the world. This fact supports the argument of Ighodaro (2010), which stresses that visual media serves the basic need of the society in all fields of human endeavour.

MacBride et al (1980:9) share similar opinion with Forman and Ighodaro when they say that "symbols make up messages and that the means which carry them are simply two facets of one reality...symbols, icons and pictures, all are means of visual communication and the medium, be it printed images, radio or television, not only carries the message but is simultaneously another symbol of communication". They, however, emphasize the fact that "communication is all-encompassing 'global' occurrence that cannot be reduced to or describe in terms of isolated, independent parts, each element being an integral part of the whole"

Going by the above analyses, it can be reiterated that among myriads of communication tools that are relevant to marketing political aspirants in this contemporary period is visual art: a medium that easily increases public awareness through images that accompany written messages. Examples abound in branding of vehicles, graphic illustrations for electronic and print media, poster designs, story board animation, cartoons, billboards, symbols, body decorations and photography. Also there are developments of a whole

range of visual elements for conveying political messages; these are graphic symbols that include the pictogram and ideogram that associate the representation of human beings with political idea.

The issues of discourse on political advertising towards the marketing of Nigerian politicians through visual media are numerous. Before focusing on these issues, the three key words in the title of the study need to be operationally defined in order to put the matters on marketing of politicians through visual media in the right perspective. The key words are: Marketing, Politicians and Visual Media.

**Marketing** according to Kirkpatrick (1983:145) is the management process of identifying, anticipating and satisfying customers' requirements profitably. Agbakoba (1992:13) says it is a process that, within the societal goals and aspirations, attempts to establish mutually satisfying exchange relationships between people or organizations who seek to satisfy their requirements. In relation to this study it means coming up with modes of satisfying electorate needs such that they happily part with their votes from which the politicians are elected into position of authority. **Politicians** are politic persons, who make a profession out of politics or play the game of politics. They are intriguers, who are versed in the science of government and engaged in political activities or statesmanship; these are people interested in party politics. In the context of this study, the concept refers to career politicians, who are seeking to garner votes in elections through visual communication.

**Visual Media** are instruments that involve the art of transmitting messages to channels that link people to symbolic codes, which are used to transfer messages. "They are means by which messages are received and stored... they, like any other human disciplines have rules, customs and conditions that define and regulate human relationship and events" (Ugboajah, 1985:14).

### Review of Related Works

To date there are no published works on the role played by visual media in marketing Nigerian politicians. Most of the related works by scholars therefore have little relevance to this study. But this notwithstanding some deductions could still be made out of the few materials that have such relevant information. The works that have some bearing on the study are those of Burns (1968), Penniman (1968), Viorst (1968), Wiggin (1968), Agbakoba (1992), Caywood (1992), Gabbertas (1992), Nwosu (1992),

Nzeribe (1992), Nzimiro (1992), Ohiwerei (1992), Abodunrin (1995), Asemota and Araka (1996) and Akande (1999).

Burns' view that "the relationship which exists between the United States' legislature and executives has been one of checks and balances" is of no importance to this study that is based on Nigeria's political system. Penniman opines that: "during election primaries most candidates enter or remain aloof according to their estimates of probable outcome". He argues that the arrival of television has changed the nature of political candidates, but he has little evidence to support his argument. Viorst finds significant differences between the two major political parties in the United States; in philosophical outlook, in historical development, in their appeal to special communities. He notes that the personalities and the views of leading contenders for highest offices reflect the range of opinion within each party. Wiggin places emphasis on actions by student protesters and civil rights militants in the context of two hundred years of American experience with dissent and civil disobedience. According to him, Americans have historically manifested toleration towards violent expressions of opposition that has confused many political observers from other countries of the world. Noticeably, the works of these foreign authors are too normative; full of western coloration because the facts and arguments they put forward in their academic discourse portend a strong affinity for western nuances

Agbakoba focuses mainly on the lessons that can be drawn from consumer marketing in Nigeria while Caywood bases his arguments on political advertising strategies and tactics. He sees advertising as a whole as an enduring element of cultural communication. To him, advertising strategies and tactics must be chosen with the character and culture of the polity in view. He also emphasizes the ethical considerations that must be provided as a parameter for what can be said by whom and in what context of political advertising. However, he fails to mention the importance of visual media to advertising. Gabbert points to the fact that it is very easy to lose direction and bearing in the heat of an election campaign. He advises the election managers to conduct periodic reviews of their strategy, performance, obstacles and facilitating factors to ensure that they are not only moving in the right direction, but also utilizing all available promotional tools and political opportunities.

Nwosu pays attention to the development of advertising campaign in contemporary British politics. He, however, manages to mention the fact that newspaper is the most widely used channel of political advertising in Nigeria. Nzeribe's attempt is closer to the topic of this study because he makes repeated references to the use of visual elements in political advertising. He reinforces his arguments by discussing at length the historical antecedents of political advertising in contemporary Nigerian society. Nzimiro presents a synoptic analysis of the fundamental issues in political advertising. He discusses party politics from both the theoretical and historical perspectives and gives a comprehensive analysis of party politics in Nigeria, providing the salient issues associated with its character and he appraises the role of advertising in the management of political campaigns.

Ohiwerei talks extensively on successful marketing techniques and he notes: "in adapting marketing techniques to politics, it is apposite to restate its conceptual basis". He includes that "the politician needs a good marketing service to assist him achieve his objectives", but he fails to state in clear terms the significance of visual elements in the service of fostering the aspirations of political demagogues. Abodunrin tries to distinguish public relations from advertising without stating the fact that both are aspects of promotional mix that visual artists can take advantage of in their efforts while packaging political aspirants.

Asemota and Araka just devote a chapter of their book to the historical evolution of advertising in Nigeria, and two other chapters are used in discussing the legal matters relating to advertising in Nigeria. They, however, pay no attention to the contributions that visual images have made to historical development of advertising in this contemporaneous period. Like Aboderin, Akande merely compares public relations with propaganda, advertising and marketing without explaining the effectiveness of their relationship within the context of skills and creative involvement.

The reviewed works are not totally the same with what the study is about. They are just isolated cases with limited relevance. They are, however, found useful in some aspects. Since the available materials are inadequate there is need to examine the role of visual media in marketing Nigerian politicians. Data for the study were collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data were gathered through inferential observations and evaluative judgments of past political phenomena while the secondary

materials were got from books, journals, newspapers, magazines and the internet. Replicable and valid inferences were made before synthesizing and analyzing the contents of these materials, using descriptive method.

### **The Issues, Perspectives and Techniques for Marketing Politicians**

The result reveals that the pre-colonial norms on modern Nigerian system have greater influence on importance that is being attached to rituals of traditional institutions, political dogmatism, materialism, estheticism, ethnicity, favoritism, nepotism and retrogressive old political idioms. This is the reason why the role that is being played by political advertising practitioners in the new trajectory the Nigerian nation is charting must be accorded normative relevance that will be focused on the comprehension of the traditional environment in which the practitioners operate and the political terrain where the leaders function.

The ethical issues should as well be paramount in which the stakeholders in advertising industry can decipher the good from the bad, the progressives from reactionaries and the old from the new. If these ideals are in proper place, the politicians will be packaged adequately. Packaging in the creative and practical sense will allow for the first real contact that the politicians make with the electorate. The practitioners need to imbibe the principle of rational means of packaging politicians for knowledgeable voters that are anxious for high esteem polity based on meaningful political development.

Packaging politician in this new political dispensation by creative artists requires full knowledge of electorate and the aspirants in order to provide the best education and information for them on electoral matters. If this is not properly done by the creative man in the context of objectivity the problem of political impasse may arise. To avoid this type of situation, psychological packaging is inevitable to make difference between success and failure and a good message developed in terms of content and creativity by the Visualizer should, however, be a basic qualification for *apropos* political advertising.

The researcher observes that in packaging worthwhile election materials for political aspirants three distinctive techniques have been used pervasively, these are: Persuasion, Propaganda and Hard-hitting. First, it was observed that visuals developed for political advertising in Nigeria mostly possess a measure of persuasive messages that attract the affection of voters and convince them to accept a candidate seeking position in a political

arrangement. “Persuasion is a technique of influencing the values, beliefs and attitudes or behaviour of another person by a communicator”, (Weaver and Hybels, 2001). Persuasion in the context of politics in Nigeria is a planned and deliberate attempt made to get a point of view accepted by eligible voters.

Second, the study shows that propaganda technique is equally a viable raw material in Nigeria’s political campaigns. It is, however, worthy of mention that effective political campaign requires a mastery of propaganda technique; a method that enables political candidate gain superior edge over opposition and win support in the process of canvassing for votes. This is a process used by most Nigerian advertising experts in studying and classifying voters as well as positioning political candidates in meeting their needs. These needs may include “an appeal to bread and butter”, which politicians like Chief Obafemi Awolowo of *Action Group* and *Unity Party of Nigeria* adopted in addressing some basic economic problems such as provision of jobs, reduction of price of commodities, provision of free health services, education and so on. The emotional factors behind these needs often play a significant role in determining the way votes go.

Third, adoption of aggressive, hard-hitting- “attacking advertising” strategy is seen as the most prevalent in Nigeria’s political landscape. In most cases, reminders of past dismal performance of opposition party are aired in powerful and emotive communication to dismantle its political stronghold. This latter statement could be used to background the fact that the “knocking ads” strategy used against the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) by National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in the 1983 political tussle was based on the belief that it was relatively easy to develop impactful message that could deride the ego of Chief Obafemi Awolowo-the opposition leader.

In a decisive political interplay, the NPN promoted a memorable *thirty seconds candle light commercial* on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) network programme to attack and reduce UPN share of votes. The commercial was short, direct and communicated a “Knocking message” in a dramatic scene where a lit candle was blown off instantaneously to the chagrin of million viewers. The scene simply symbolizes the darkness that covers political milieu of the opposition after the daylight. The main objective behind this “knocking message” is to make electorate believe that UPN has lost its bearing and was running out of steam: trying to create a

visual impression that the opposition camp could no longer hold the center as things were fallen apart.

### **Usage of Principles and Elements of Designs in Developing Voters' Interest in Political Candidates**

It is also observed that the recent development in Nigeria's political campaigns lends itself to visual techniques that make political advertising interesting and attractive with sound aesthetic principles and elements of designs such as balance, contrast, proportion and unity, and attention, interest, desire, conviction and action.

**Balance** is a state of physical steadiness in which weight is evenly distributed. It is one of the means that has been used in making visuals for political advertising appear restful. According to Baskette and Sissors (1971), an unbalanced advertisement usually gives the public/viewer a vague feeling of uneasiness because of the concentration of weight in only one or two sections.

**Contrast** is the principle of using at least two or more elements, each of which is dramatically different from the other. This is usually applied to prevent a visual material from looking dull and gray. The problem of dullness and grayness occurs when the body of a copy is too heavy with words and the headline is very light.

**Proportion** is the principle of comparative relationships. In political advertising design, the shape of one element is favorably compared with the others. The goal of a visual artist therefore is to create a design in which the proportions of elements are pleasing to the eye of viewer. **Unity** is the principle that concerns the effect of a message that creates a single impression rather than multiple impressions. To Baskette and Sissors (1971) messages in an advert that has unified elements appear as if each element is contributing a significant share to the total design arrangement. A political message that does not have unity will definitely appear as a collection of myriads of materials each of which is fighting for viewer/public attention.

The general public is likely to lose interest in a political candidate if essential information is not creatively presented in an advert. It is as a result of this that most Nigerian visual artists that are involved in political advertising have been striven very hard to strategically position political candidates through

appropriate use of elements of artistic design. A tiny political advert had attracted attention because it was well positioned. Also, the use of creative devices like colour, headline, illustration, and general layout with good choice of type, size and shape have attracted voters' attention to political candidates. The attention was created through adequate planning of the advert.

**Interest** has been achieved through the use of beautiful pictures, illustrations, or copies, which were strengthened by the originality of the wordings. Catchy phrases and messages have been built round political candidates' programmes to encourage voters to desire them. Strong political messages that can convince voters have been used through typographies that are accompanied by illustrations and pictures and immediate appeal to action was created in the headline and the entire body content by visual artists to build interest and desire of voters.

### **The Role of Visual Communication in Articulating Political Messages in Contemporary Nigerian Society**

Visual communication stands as a basic form of expression that the practitioners of political advertising have been using since the introduction of moving icons carried by the electronic media. Despite the appeal of broadcast media, the primordial static pictures have not lost their significant position as the frequent and widespread use of newspapers, magazines, posters, book illustrations, vehicle branding, billboards, photography and comic strips have shown.

The posters are traditional samples of simple means of transferring information from potential public office holders to the electorate. They serve the multiple roles of persuading, promoting, informing and educating the voters as well as merchandizing politicians. They have been favoured as the most effective and efficient communication tools used in every part of the world when changes occur. Simply put, the excellent symbolic designs of posters have endowed the political landscape of Nigeria and they have been used to recognize the essence of promoting politicians.

In recent times, the popularity of comic strips is soaring high due to their education, information and entertainment values. Their contents have gone beyond aestheticism to include materials with political undertones. Their production method has engendered a more social and political appeal. They

are mostly syndicated in the tabloids and broadsheets in which they satisfy the need of being independent watch-dogs and mouth pieces that sometimes launder the image of politicians. A critical examination of cartoons produced by new generations of visual artists in Nigeria shows politically slanted works that serve as visual supports to massive editorials and these supports have successfully stimulated the thinking of newspaper readers.

Photography is another visual medium of expression that deals with the production of permanent record of an image by the combined action of light and chemical properties. It serves as a universal language whose content is seen and understood by peoples of every race. According to Germsheim and Alison (1973: 67), it is a language that bridges the gap between nations and cultures and it links the family of man. Pictures in the repertoire of Nigerian photographers have been offering quick and easy means of understanding political events. The political life of Nigerian politicians documented through photographs has given the opportunity to arrange, compose, and control the nation's political record.

It is apposite to say that myriads of visual communication concepts such as word, letter, picture, colour, value, message, legibility, copy and layout, line, shape and masses of subjects have also been developed to articulate political messages in Nigeria. A number of factors influence these visual communication concepts among them are *typography* and *medium*.

**Typography** was described by Foster (1978:65) as the art or style of printing that is related to copy and layout. Copy is a matter for printing while layout is the general appearance of a printed page. From this description it can be summed up that copy and layout had represented the most important aspect of modern Nigerian political advertising for one reason; they both create the situation of great impact on target audience and has been observed from previous studies on political marketing that the greatest secret to effectiveness of political message is the simplicity of message and high level of creativity in the copy and layout produced by Visualizer. The beauties of the copy and layout were appreciated by the viewers when the right letter style was used in the adverts produced for candidates.

The Nigerian electorate is now appreciating the fact that visual artists are dressing the political advertising messages in clothing that strongly implies the thought as the actual words express it. The artists are using method of letter decoration or display that supplies interest and pleasure to win the

reading and remembrance of political messages with less mental efforts. Three families of type are popular among the visual artists in passing these messages across to voters, these are: roman, gothic and italic. **Roman** letter is used on regular basis because of its simplicity, legibility and ideal proportion. Its character suggests dignity and refinement. It has alternating thick and thin strokes as well as myriad styles of *serifs*. **Gothic** or **Sans Serif** is the most popular type that has robust form that attracts attention. Its angular square cut ends, lack of subtleties and simplicity make it a regular instrument for visual artists. **Italic** is a letter form that has been used by artists to apply the abstract idea of elegance, femininity, daintiness, grace, chastity, gentility, courtliness and fashionableness. "Italic is a slanting lettering form of more or less cursive appearance" (Foster, 1978).

**Medium** selection by advertising agencies depends largely on the following factors: messages, fund availability, target audience and strategy and the data collected on these factors revealed that the visual media that can be managed and selected by visual artists in marketing politicians include: *Scheme, Theme, Outdoor* and *Ephemeral* media.

The reasons for their selection are:

- (1) the scheme media or below-the-line media such as posters, leaflet, symbol, T-shirt, sticker and calendar are inexpensive, strategic and effective. During political campaigns in Nigeria, colourful posters have been strategically posted on street walls, railway platforms, bus stops and airport halls. Signage or symbols are also gaining popularity because ornamental designs that are classified under publicity have been used as elements of political promotion on T-shirts, caps and traditional attires. A classical example is the zoomorphic images (of horses) that embroidered the *Agbada* costumes worn by Chiefs M.K.O Abiola and Olusegun Obasanjo to send political messages to voters in the years 1993 and 1999 respectively. The incorporation of two images of horses and the coat of arm in Nigerian green colour symbolizes *Strength in Unity*
- (2) the theme media or above-the-line media such as newspaper, magazine and television are dramatic, simple and inexpensive with high frequency and wide coverage. They are channels through which the visual artists have reached the large, anonymous and heterogeneous voters simultaneously. According to Nwosu (1992)

newspaper has remained the most widely used channel of political advertising in Nigeria because it accommodates illustrations and cartoons that are used to support the editorials and the television is attractive because it communicates the visual messages in dramatic way.

- (3) the outdoor media or transit media such as transportation, vehicle branding and billboard are explosive and strategic in outlook. Common examples are the creatively designed vehicles with loudspeaker used in distributing handbills and large boards on which creative posters are displayed and (4) the ephemeral media such as body painting, callisthenic display and skywriting are unique, strategic and dramatic. Painting on human body to promote politicians is now a common occurrence in Nigeria's political landscape. It remains the most inexpensive means of using the concepts and elements of visual arts to arouse interest and attention of voters. Callisthenic is a graphic display of beauty and strength used by Chief Bola Ige of Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) to popularize his government in Oyo State during the second republic. For economic reason it is no longer possible for most visual artists to employ sky writing technique for political marketing. In 1963, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of Action Group (A.G) used the technique to send campaign messages during political rallies. Nzeribe (1992) notes that: "the technique is a unique visual strategy in contemporary Nigeria, but it cannot go very far because it lacks integrated marketing communication principles".

### **Conclusion**

It is established that the visual concepts developed by artists have contributed immensely in promoting Nigerian politicians. The artists have been using designs, which were accompanied by words, pictures, colours, values, lines, shapes, masses of subjects as well as other graphic art forms and this has made Nigerians to witness a more colourful campaign exercise between 1963 and now. The myriads of media techniques adopted by visual artists have delivered electorate from the bondage of ignorance and illiteracy and introduced light into their life.

The study indicates that the future of visual arts as a profession in Nigeria depends largely on the degree of improvement of the resources available to

the practitioners. The visual artists need to be encouraged to transmit important messages through printed words and image-making channels in greater and higher frequencies.

These image-making channels need a foundation of numerical and visual literacy for efficient and effective political promotional mix. Then, the visual artists need to be empowered and encouraged by the government and stakeholders in advertising business in facing all the challenges that accompany the modern information technology.

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