

Emblematic Analysis of APC “Broom” and PDP “Umbrella” Logos as Symbols of Communication

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Abstract

There are several political parties in Nigeria but the ruling party, All Progressives Congress and the People’s Democratic Party are the two most renowned parties across the nation. However, each party has its logo, which they identify them with, for instance, the ruling party (APC) has “broom” as its logo while the major opposition party, PDP has “umbrella” as its own logo. These two logos have both connotative and denotative meanings. Perhaps, this is why the parties selected them as a way of communicating to the citizenry that they are out to protect their interest. This paper, therefore, analysed the emblems of the two major parties to determine their meanings and how the meanings reflect governance. It is anchored on the semiotic theory. The analysis reveals that that APC logo is symbolic of a party out to sweep away the wrath in the society. However, the positioning of the broom in the logo from a traditional sense has association with occultism. The PDP logo is symbolic of protection. Nevertheless, it is assumed that it has tolerance for misdemeanors.

Keywords: Emblems, Semiotics, APC, PDP, Political parties, Political communication, Nigeria.

Introduction

Logos have distinct communicative elements. Their uses in social interactions communicate meanings to the recipients. In political

communication, the power of logos rests in their extensive use as a mark of identity for the party members and voters alike. Logos as symbols have cultural implications. The interpretation given to a particular logo may go beyond the ordinary meaning to a nuanced understanding. This is why symbolism as an art of using simple shapes or forms to express a more complicated idea or concept varies in the receivers' perception of the symbol (Shen, 2017). In other words, the meaning that a receiver may denote from a symbol may be quite different from how another person will decode it. Perhaps, this is the reason why political parties also adopt symbols so as to allow the electorates to decode their meanings and then choose them over others.

In communication studies, meaning making of visual images falls within the realm of semiotics. Although, written words help in communicating meaning, the nature of a society determines the dominance of a communication form. In a society with low literacy, visual communication can in no small way help the illiterates to decipher the meaning of text (logo). Kress (2010) observes that the current era is being marked by a major shift away from the dominance of writing to the dominance of screen images. Adham (2012) reiterates that the ubiquitous state of images in almost every part of the globe tends to conflate different semiotic resources, or modes, in order to produce a convincing end product. Moehler, Conroy-Krutz, and Pariente (2016) explain that there is further anecdotal evidence that the logos, rather than simply facilitating efficacious voting, themselves can make a difference in voters' decisions. Positive customer-based brand equity develops when consumers acquire two types of brand knowledge: brand awareness and brand image (Mackay 2001). Although, the scholars here refer to tangible goods and brands but it is still relevant to this study because if the electorates are not aware of the political parties and have in-depth meanings of their symbols, they may not want to vote for them. In fact, in many parts of the world, political parties use symbols and colours for identification. Political party symbols and colours are used to make political activities visible and avoid confusion. Political parties are formed to participate in national elections and to promote democracy. To an extent, Nigerian electorates have affiliated themselves with one political party or the other based on numerous factors, including the symbols or emblems and colours of a party,

flag bearer of a party, philosophy of a party and others. However, this study focused on the symbols of the two major political parties in Nigeria; the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP).

It is a known fact that political parties all over the world have symbols and colours that are associated with their parties and the ones in Nigeria are no exception. Yet, many electorates do not know the meaning of most of these logos, although some claim they do but that might also be at the surface level. For instance, "broom" is the symbol of the All Progressives Party and brooms ordinarily are used for sweeping away dirt and thereby making the environment clean while that of People's Democratic Party is "umbrella" which is used as covering against rain or sunshine. The interpretation given to a logo or symbol can flow from the cultural understanding of its symbolism. One may ask, what other meaning can be attached to a symbol that communicates meaning? Meaning making has a lot to do with the experience and the socio-cultural milieu of the receiver. Against this background, what is the denotative and communicative meaning of the logos of APC and PDP within Nigeria's political sphere? In other words, what do the logos of both parties represent? It is in this connection that this article sets the following objectives for itself:

1. Identify and describe the meaning of symbols as used by All Progressive Congress and Peoples Democratic Party.
2. Unearth the symbolism of the symbols of All Progressive Congress and Peoples Democratic Party.

Review of Related Studies

In graphic communication, logo is an abbreviation for Logo-type. It is composed of the symbols and signature/signs of a company or an organization. It is used interchangeably with corporate identity, trademark, symbol and signature (Agba & Okoro, 1995). The aim of a logo is to communicate the meaning, which an organization represents. Meaning making with reference to symbols flows from semiotics. Moriarty (1995) explains that semiotics is a philosophical approach that seeks to interpret [visual] messages in terms of their signs and patterns of symbolism. In the same vein, Kress (2003) conceives it as the science of the sign, a fusion of form/signifier and meaning/signified (p. 41).

The cultural framework of semiotics is well captured in the summation of Irvine (2005) who asserts that, all symbolic systems [such as script, image, and gesture] in a culture function like a second order language or text. (...) If we think about cultural signs of all kinds as a second-order language, we can investigate a kind of semiotic deep structure, a grammar of meaning, a repertoire of codes, acquired by members of a culture in ways similar to, but distinct from, internalizing the grammar of one's own native language. Ransdell (1977) contends that semiotics takes two forms; a general semiotics that seeks to answer, what is the nature of meaning? And a specific semiotics that asks, how do our reality words, gestures, myths, products/services, acquire meaning? It stands to reason from these perspectives that meaning is not only deciphered from what are seen of an image or symbol but what the community considers it to be. The community can be symbolic or interpretive.

Akpan *et al* (2013) claim that the discovery of the various forms of messages in Barthes' analysis; implied that the interpretation of meaning is not limited to the individual elements of the copy but to the interaction, juxtaposition of the differences, and the banalities of the other components of the copy. They contend that making meaning from the symbol requires corresponding interactions and/or negotiations of meaning through the code systems and conventions validated by the experiences or uses of the users. The appearances of symbols in political parties convey a message, which cannot be verbally explained in simple terms (Enninful, 2012). This visual is translated effectively by using the eyes. The symbols are found on almost all the paraphernalia that the selected political parties use in their political activities (Shen, 2017). Moreover, Reynolds & Steenbergen (2006) explain that any mark, shape or sign that represents an asset of words, quality, or an idea is defined as a symbol. This is corroborated by Thomassen, Bull, Lied, and Turner (2012) cited in Shen (2017) while saying that symbols play major roles in every aspect of our lives – traditionally, socially, religiously, politically and economically.

Symbols serve as a means by which the electorates are identified as a people. Hence, in modern times they represent basic principles, which have guided the masses general outlook (Shen, 2017). Politically, the significance of symbols to the electorates cannot be ignored at all. Looking at the various political parties in Nigeria,

each one of them is founded on an ideology that needs to be understood to guide the voter. On the other hand, symbols appeal to the international community should the respective party win political power. This attracts a lot of goodwill for that country with the offshoot being major benefits for the citizenry (electorates) (Enniful, 2012). This will be more obvious if the party that formed government initiates policies and programmes that enhance development and attract investors and tourists. The use of symbols becomes very important in this situation where nearly half of the adult population who qualify to vote can neither read nor write (Thomassen, *et al*, 2012 cited in Shen, 2017). In other words, symbols can help those who could not read the name of the party to be able to know their preferred party because they would have been used to their logos over time.

Kenner (2000) did a study on how symbols make a text through a social semiotic analysis of writing in a multilingual nursery. She noted that research on early script learning has shown that young children produce a considerable variety of graphic forms in their spontaneous writing. Social semiotic theory aims to account for this variety by analysing the links between children's socio-cultural experience and their interpretation of written language as a visual sign system. She analysed texts produced by three and four-year-olds in a nursery class, where the role play area was enriched with everyday literacy materials and parents were invited to write in different languages in the classroom. Evidence from a year's fieldwork showed that children used a diversity of symbols throughout this period. Three factors were found to have explanatory significance: (a) awareness of the visual appearance of different types of text (b) children's current symbolic repertoire and (c) their social identity as writers. The multilingual experience was incorporated into children's exploration of how writing operated as a representational system. This means that children's symbolic experiences have implications for their writing abilities. In any society with strong symbolic culture, images, logos or symbols that have different uses can throw up different meanings or interpretation when presented within a larger system. Thus, the logos of political parties could throw up meanings, which may not appear obvious.

Akpan *et al* (2013) did a semiotic deconstruction of symbols in print advertising contents and its implications for consumers'

purchase decisions on Nigerians. The basis of their analysis was foregrounded in expositional works of Fiske (1989) and Akpan (1996) in the field of semiotics. Their study examined first, the communicative values of symbols in print advertisement copies of selected Nigerian products; second, the relative influence of symbolic interpretations on consumers' purchase decisions as well as the implications of such influence on product marketing. Adopting twin methodological approaches of qualitative content analysis and the survey, the study investigated the signifier-signified relationships and interpretation in the iconic, linguistic (referential, emotive and conative) and ideological values of elements of the studied product. Findings from the study revealed the dominance of synchronic convergence in the signifier-signified values of symbols found in the studied advertisements, and also, a relatively insignificant diachronic relationship between the symbolic values of the advertisements and consumers' claim of influence on product purchase decisions. Findings also showed strong ideological influence in consumers' interpretation of copy values vis-a-vis their purchase decisions. The study concluded that semiological inputs in advertising and marketing are extant and relevant to contemporary promotional strategies. The study made a strong recommendation for the inclusion of semiotic appraisals as a component of advertising effectiveness test during campaigns.

For instance, one of the selected parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) has a broom being held by a hand as its symbol. The broom in the African traditional way of life is what is used to sweep away dirt and make the environment clean. As it is known, no one loves to stay or inhabit a dirty environment. Hence, the broom becomes a very important tool in the house. Aribisala (2018) observes that the broom is a powerful and effective symbol for a political party. In practical everyday life, brooms are used to sweep away dirt. It is, therefore, appropriate for a political party, especially one in opposition, to use it as a symbol of its determination to sweep away the government in power and clean up the filth and corruption in society. The People's Democratic Party has an "umbrella" as its symbol. The umbrella signifies protection from rain and sunshine. It means that the government when it gets to power, it will protect the citizenry and not allow rain to drench them nor the sun to scorch them. Labbo (1996) using semiotic analysis, investigated the

production and use of young children's symbol making on the computer in a kindergarten classroom. The following questions were addressed: What types of computer generated symbols do kindergartners use? What do the symbols mean to the children? How do the children assign meaning to symbols within the cultural context of the computer center? How do kindergartners learn to use the various media tools available in a word and art processing programme to produce symbols? Data for the ethnographic study included field notes, video and audiotapes of whole class computer activities and children's computer centre activities, interviews with children and the teacher about their computer related activities, and printouts of children's work on the computer.

A semiotic analysis of data led the author to use the metaphor of screen land to describe children's stances toward their work. From this perspective, children viewed the computer as a land to be entered for various purposes that included playing in screenland, creating art in screenland, and writing in screenland. These stances were shaped by children's emerging understanding of the purposes and forms of language, arts, and multimedia and influenced the types of symbols they generated. Furthermore, findings suggest that as these children emerged as users of symbols they also learned how to discover and express meaning. Support is given for a continued expansion of the definition of young children's literacy and literacy development to include multiple modes. It must be emphasized that the use of symbols in political parties continues to be the surest way of communicating both visually and physically to the Nigerian electorates. Thus, their importance cannot be underestimated or ignored (Adams, 2004). This is because, many people including the electorates, value artefacts in different ways; they include decorative purposes, political growth and economic values. Emblematic analysis has occupied the attention of some scholars, for instance, Matsumoto (2012), did a study of cultural similarities and differences in emblematic gestures and noted that though there has been longstanding interest in cultural differences in emblems, there have only been a few systematic investigations of those differences.

He catalogues and compares emblems across different cultural groups to a standard list of verbal messages. He used encoders from six world regions to produce potential emblems from a standard verbal message list. Gestures that were encoded by at least 70% of

the encoders in a region were shown to observers from the same regions, and gestures that were judged correctly as the message intended by at least 70% of the decoders in that region were considered emblems. These procedures resulted in the cataloguing of cultural differences in emblems to the same verbal message list. The results indicated a small group of emblems that were similarly encoded and decoded across cultures. Adham (2012) dissertation evaluated the Iconic Representation of Women in the Middle Eastern Media in order to determine how various semiotic resources have been utilized in conveying specific messages to a given audience. The visual texts selected for the study, originate from both Western and Arab sources. Both sources were identified as being major influences in Arabian media. The Kress and Van Leeuwen framework for the reading of visual images (2006) was utilized as an investigative tool. The objective of her study was to examine how advertising psychologically positions its audience, and is compared to the way in which the linguistic function of speech demands action from its recipient. The result of her study that different messages emitted via the medium of advertising, may induce the viewer into adopting a particular course of action, in addition to inciting feelings of aspiration and longing in them. Finally, the messages unearthed in the wake of this study seem to suggest that the Arabian media is dominated by the presence of two different advertising agenda. The foregoing demonstrates that semiotics helps to better interpret images, symbols or logos within a framework that is audience centred. Thus, the interpretation given to a party logo may flow from the experience and cultural milieu of the interpreter.

Theoretical and Methodological Considerations

The most appropriate theory for this study is the semiotic theory. According to Reyes (2008), semiotics came from the Greek "Semiotikon" which means "signs" as well as the study of signs and their interpretation. Roland Barthes propounded the theory when he observed that the content of the media makes a profound difference in the message (Ikpe, 2012 cited in Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2017). He further said that semiotics is the study of media images and the way they can be opted to serve alternative ends. The logos of the selected political parties are signs to communicate their intentions to the public. As stated earlier, it

speaks volumes to most of the electorates who cannot read nor write; hence, merely seeing the signs will make them understand what they stand to gain when they vote for the party. Also, semiotics is concerned with anything that can stand for something else (Alfred, 2019; Eco, 1976 & Chandler, 2007). Alfred (2019) further explains that the study of semiotics has important practical significance. Every object has an embedded meaning. Every one of us is constantly unconsciously interpreting the meaning of signs around them. Barthes (1992) observes that every ideological sign is a result of two interconnected sign systems. The first is strictly descriptive, that is, the signifier image and the signified concept combining to produce a denotative sign. This otherwise means, the symbol itself as well as the meaning derived from the sign (cited in Asemah *et al*, 2017). The paper used semiotic codes based on the emblematic analysis. Emblematic analysis reveals the conceptual and the emotional meanings attached to an object. It also explains the object to guide the reader or viewers' perception, thoughts, attitudes values and behaviour (Sillars & Gronbeck, 2001). Hence, in this study, the literary and denotative meanings of the symbols of APC and PDP were explained to offer deeper meanings and understanding to the reader. In other words, the sign, the signifier formed the basis of the analysis.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The importance of symbols cannot be overemphasized, as it has been so effective across ages. However, it is expedient to take a closer look at the symbols of the selected political parties.

i. All Progressives Congress (APC)



Figure 1: APC logo, Source; Apc.com.ng

It is noteworthy that the broom symbol was imported from the then Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), after the coalition by some political parties to form the APC, the broom symbol was also adopted. The party adopted the broom that is being held by a hand as its logo. Ordinarily, broom is a good tool used to clean an environment. One would have hoped that the party on gripping power will clean away all the filth or dirt that have been accumulated in the country over time (Aribisala, 2018). If one takes a close look at the symbol of broom, one will tend to discover that it is not only used to sweep dirt and keep the environment clean, in addition, it serves to clean the room and ceiling of spider webs. However, it has an esoteric function. This is why the broom has fetish symbology as it is also used by occult persons to invoke powers. This is why Aribisala (2018) contends that "the broom apart from being a good tool literally, it is also a witchcraft symbol believed by the cultist to provide the power to rise above the earthly plane and to soar in the spirit realm. In the West, brooms are associated with witches visualized as hags who fly through the air on broomsticks." He further claims, these witches use their cultist brooms to sweep away their traces to avoid detection. In fact, herbalists use the broom to invoke the spirit of the dead. The broom is used as a gate or door before a ritual space. A witch draws a magical circle, enters it, and then places the broom over the doorway as a means to keep out unwanted energies or people (Aribisala, 2018).

A clear look at the symbol reveals that the broom is held up instead of being held down. There is sufficient evidence to indicate that the APC employed the broom as an instrument of witchcraft and superstition during the 2015 elections. What is cultist about the APC broom is the way and manner it is displayed. The APC broom is held up and not down. It is held above the head and then waved in the air. This gives it a hidden meaning not generally recognised. In the occult, when brooms are waved in the air, they have the opposite effect of cleaning up dirt; they spread dirt. When waved in the air, brooms pour dirt on our heads. This makes it sinister that the APC chose this very gesture as its definitive slogan. In this part of the world, it is considered taboo for men especially to raise the broom above the head. To do so is to invoke evil spirits. With the broom raised everywhere during the campaigns, the APC used it to

cast a spell on Nigerians. This means, brooms can also be a sign of bad luck (Ukaegbu, 2015). In Yoruba folklore, it is a bad omen for the broom to stand erect; it must lie on the ground. The taboo is that if it stands erect, it will be used by evil spirits to bring bad luck. The occult design here was fitted for APC electoral purposes. Moreover, in India, from where APC may have borrowed this hocus pocus; the mother goddess who waves the broom is called Shitala (Aribisala, 2018). This Hindu siren has several hands and is associated with quite a number of debilitating ailments, many not immediately apparent. At first, the broom would seem to meet all of our deepest longings. But, sooner than later, the devastating side effects would emerge and that is already happening now.

To further underscore this occult presence, a huge broom was made at the heart of the country, which is a way to finally turn the nation to an occult haven. Although, the broom is united at the bottom and this would seem to signify unity but that is not the case as there is now so much division in the party. With President Muhammadu Buhari now at the helms of affairs, Nigerians have witnessed a lot of squabbles within the APC. Attempts to paper over the cracks are illusory. More ominous is the president's emergence as a sectional ethnic leader. His blatantly lopsided political appointments, designed to make the south a colony of the north, pose a great threat to Nigeria's unity (Aribisala, 2018). The fact remains that since the inception of Buhari led administration, while a number of corruption cases have been decided by the courts with many sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, there is also evidence to suggest that the dirt they came to clean is now being spread in another form through nepotism and tolerance of those accused of corruption, abuse of power and violations of laid down procedures in conducting government business because they are close to the seat of power. The inability of Nigerians to react suggests clearly, that Nigerians inadvertently accepted the rule of the broom goddess. This seeming interpretation of the current realities of the nation represented by the symbol of the ruling party rests with Alfred's (2019) submission that the study of semiotics has important practical significance. Every object has an embedded meaning. Every one of us is constantly unconsciously interpreting the meaning of signs around them.

ii. *People's Democratic Party*



Figure 2: PDP logo Source: peoplesdemocraticparty.com.ng

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) has an umbrella as its logo. Literarily, the umbrella protects one from sunshine or rainfall as it shields one from been scorched or drenched. However, taking a closer look at this logo, it goes beyond just the protection. The political party is known for shielding its corrupt members; perhaps that was why they adopted an umbrella as its logo. The party ruled Nigeria for sixteen (16) years while allowing corruption to be the order of the day. Money laundering into developed countries, among others, characterized the period of the party held the reins of power at the centre. One wonders why the umbrella the party promised to use to protect the citizens has now been hijacked by the 'powers that be' as they were the only ones protected by the umbrella. In fact, since no hand was holding the umbrella, it means it belongs to no one and could even be kept aside instead of being used for its purpose. Nevertheless, since the umbrella serves to accommodate all, it presents a mixture of the good, the bad and the ugly. From the period the party held power, there was an array of brilliant and incompetent administrators. Even against public outcry against such deficiencies, the party is was always quick to stand for its members

Conclusion

Globally, all political parties have logos that they use to identify themselves and Nigerian political parties are not different. This has

helped the electorates (both literate and illiterate) to know the parties to vote for or support during elections. The two selected parties, APC and PDP's logos have been analysed in this study and we can deduce that what Nigerians believe the logos mean is far from what they actually mean. Hence, it is not enough to denote meaning of a sign or symbol on the surface level. We must go deeper to be able to actually understand what they truly stand for. The realities of Nigeria's political journey from 1999 till date present a mixed bag of performance. If the parties take the ordinary meaning of their logos seriously, there ought to be evidential results that will linger in the minds of the populace. Perhaps, the denotative meaning accounts for the current realities. It is based on the foregoing that the following recommendations are made: (1) political party leaders need to defend the symbolism of their party by working tirelessly to realize the goals of the party, which the logo represents; (2) there is a need for a frequent audit of the party image in the eyes of the public, so as to correct the wrong perceptions; and (3) party men and women need to understand the significance of the party logo and work out those values which the image represents.

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