



## INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, IT AND MANAGEMENT

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**APPRAISING ICT RELEVANCE IN POLITICAL ADVERTISING****DR. CHINENYE NWABUEZE****LECTURER****DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION****ANAMBRA STATE UNIVERSITY****IGBARIAM CAMPUS****NIGERIA****RITA OKEKE****STUDENT****DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION****ANAMBRA STATE UNIVERSITY****IGBARIAM CAMPUS****NIGERIA****FESTINUS OKOYE****STUDENT****DEPARTMENT OF MASS COMMUNICATION****ANAMBRA STATE UNIVERSITY****IGBARIAM CAMPUS****NIGERIA****ABSTRACT**

*Political advertising is one of the key components of political communication used in ensuring political awareness creation, voter education and good political behaviour. Just as Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have enhanced the communication process, political advertising is also experiencing a great deal of ICT influence. This work examines the place of ICTs in political advertising. It adopts a qualitative approach in analyzing how ICTs are being used in positive and negative political advertising. It recommends that the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) should ensure that advertising practitioners adhere strictly to ethical codes in the interest of the integrity of the profession.*

**KEYWORDS**

Advertising, Political Advertising, ICTs, Political Communication.

**INTRODUCTION**

Awareness creation is a key component of political campaigns. The electorates need to know the candidates, understand their nature, policies, programmes and campaign promises. Effective awareness creation stands out a candidate among the crowd of other candidates gunning for a specific office. The specialized communication activity which specifically targets political awareness creation is political communication. This is the application of communication strategies in political information sharing, and dissemination. It is the study of who knows what about political affairs, when, where, and how (Baran, 2004). It has also been described as "the study of the flow of information through political processes" (Idong, 2008, p. 239). It is the livewire of every political activity.

Among the major strategies of effective political communication is political advertising. If advertising is "any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor" (Kotler, 2003, p. 591), then political advertising is the paid promotion of political messages of various kinds – campaign messages, political party support messages, voter education messages, adoption of good political behaviour – through the media (mass, new and traditional) by an identified sponsor. Through political advertising the electorates are empowered with information upon which they would make the right choice of who would govern the nation at every level.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are electronic devices and facilities that have made the communication process more sophisticated, efficient, effective and result oriented. The political advertising process is not left out in this sophistication. If ICTs have enhanced the communication process used in creating and disseminating advertising messages, then political advertising has benefited from this development.

Such phenomenal new technologies as the computer, Internet, World Wide Web, satellite technology, GSM, electronic bill boards, new printing technology etc. are among the developments that have modified the creation and distribution of political advertising messages. These technologies have their positive and negative effects on the political advertising process but the positive aspects far outweigh the negative aspects. As Obasi (2007, p. 85) observes, the mass media can initiate issues that can provoke political leadership to action, oppose some unpopular policies of bad government, military or civilian, and promote ideas, mobilize opinions and enlighten the people on their general rights, duties and obligation. Political advertising plays crucial roles in achieving these goals. However, the focus of this work is on how ICTs have enhanced political advertising targeted at political campaigns.

The 2011 general elections in Nigeria featured the use of ICTs in political advertising message creation, sharing and dissemination. The wide use of electronic bill boards, sophisticated print technologies, digital radio and television adverts, mobile phone, and Internet in the elections at federal and state levels shows that Nigeria has come of age in the use of new technologies in communication. How these technologies were specifically used in advertising targeted at the electorate and the fallouts (ethical) of such use is the focus of this qualitative work.

**THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING**

Firstly, what is advertising? This is the paid promotion of goods and services through the media – mass and traditional - by a sponsor. It has been defined variously by different authors as follows: "any paid form of non-personal communication about an organization; product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor" (American Marketing Association, cited by Hanson, 2005, p. 298); "the non-personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products (goods and services) or ideas by identified sponsors through various media" (Arens and Bovee, 1994, p. 6); "mass communication which is aimed at helping to sell goods, services, ideas, persons and institutions or organizations" (Nwosu, 1990, cited in Nwabueze, 2006, p.

165). A review of various definitions shows that advertising is paid for; it is promotional communication process; it promotes goods, services, ideas etc; it is channeled through the media - mass, new, and traditional; it has an identifiable sponsor.

Political advertising, therefore, refers to the paid promotion of political ideas, programmes, policies, and products such as aspirants and party manifesto, through the mass, traditional and new media by an identified sponsor. The sponsor could be a political party, political office holder, campaign organization for a candidate, government or non-governmental agencies, corporate bodies, civil society groups, or individuals. The product could be an idea, political campaign promises or manifesto, an initiative calling for provision of campaign promises or to an extent, political behaviour that could help governance. Okeke (2011) observes that political advertisements is an effective tool for political mobilization and awareness creation.

Uncyclopedia (2011) defines political advertising as the use of advertising by politicians to bring their messages to the masses. It describes this form of advertising as a multi-billion dollar industry which adopts musicians, sophisticated photographers and creative artists to drive a message to a target audience. Political advertising has also been described as including communications supporting or opposing a candidate for nomination or election to either a public officer or an office of a political party ([www.ethics.state.tx.us](http://www.ethics.state.tx.us)). "It includes communications supporting or opposing an officeholder, a political party, or a measure (a ballot proposition)" ([www.ethics.state.tx.us](http://www.ethics.state.tx.us)). In political advertising the basic aim is to win the electorate and the general public to accept political parties' ideas, propositions, candidates or administration. However, it is basically used in promotion of party candidates. The various media of political advertising include the conventional advertising media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the Internet, bill boards, posters, and such below-the-line media as T-shirts, caps, handkerchiefs, umbrellas, hand towels, cups, pen, exercise books etc.

In Nigeria, during the 2011 general elections, political advertising was the basic tool which various candidates used in targeting the electorate. The print and broadcast media, including outdoor media, below-the-line media, and transit media such as buses, taxis and tricycles (popularly called *keke*) were popularly used.

However, negative political advertising was also popular among political parties and their candidates. This is the paid promotion of negative, derogatory, defamatory messages against opponents of specific candidates who either sponsored the message by themselves or their campaign organisations and sympathisers did so. This work generally examines how new communication technologies impact on political advertising, especially the promotion of candidates for electoral offices or promotion of party platforms, manifestos, ideology, or candidates.

### CONCEPTUALIZING ICTs

Technological advancements have greatly improved communication activities of man. This feat is occasioned by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) which are electronic gadgets which enhance information storage, retrieval, processing, sharing and dissemination. The ICTs are referred to as New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) and New Communication Technologies (NCTs). These technologies have been divided into old communication technologies, that is, those used before the advent of computer (telephone, electronic news gathering camera, analogue radio and television, wireless intercom); and new communication technologies, that is, those that came after the computer was invented (Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS), digital radio and television, Internet, compact Disc, Mobile phone, websites, e-mail, video conferencing facilities (Akpan, 2004; Nwabueze, 2006; Okeke, 2011; Davies 2011). Technological advancement in the communication sector has brought about such activities as e-mail, e-banking, e-medicine, e-public relations, e-terrorism, e-advertising, video conferencing, Short Message Service (SMS), Multi Media Service (MMS), digital radio and television broadcasting, digital publishing, Direct image printing, among others. The ICTs today shape the existence of man. Organisations and individuals need to understand these ICTs and how to adopt them in daily transactions.

### ICTs, POLITICAL ADVERTISING, AND 2011 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

The use of ICTs in advertising is evident in the sophistication of the various advertising media. Digital television production has made possible image manipulation such that candidates could be presented as animated images (cartoons) dancing and promising good things to the electorate. The image of a politician today could be embedded in a background showing good facilities (electric power and pipe-borne water), good roads and housing, farmers harvesting crops etc. During the 2011 elections in Nigeria, a good number of politicians, especially incumbent governors going for second term in office used these means to present their good deeds to the electorate and promise more if elected. This is made possible by the digitalization of the production equipment and process, now beneficial in political advertising.

The printing process has also witnessed phenomenal image manipulation relevant in political advertising. Images of politicians during the 2011 general elections were juxtaposed on a background showing good projects such as roads, schools, electric power, flourishing farm etc. which is an indication of what such politicians will provide if elected. Akashoro and Thanny (2009) write that computerized photography as exemplified by programs such as Photoshop conferred on humanity the power to distort and manipulate things around them.

Writing on impact of new technologies on advertising, Baran (2004) observes that the production of advertising has inevitably been altered by computers and that such developments as computer databases and computerized printing have fueled rapid growth of direct market advertising. Baran further describes the emergence of cyber advertising which, according to him, is the convergence of print and broadcast advertising with the internet.

Technological advancements in printing technology have made poster and bill board adverts to have high fidelity picture quality that are very attractive. During the 2011 general elections, bill boards, posters, and transit media (buses, taxis, tricycles) had digitally produced images of politicians with high fidelity pictures and aesthetic value. This was more popular than the use of Internet tools in advertising, though most political parties and individual candidates had websites where they advertised their programmes.

The Global system for Mobile Communication (GSM) was one of the dominant media of political advertising during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. The use of short message service (SMS) – "a wireless service available on digital mobile phone networks" (Brand and Roald, 2004, p. 239), was common among political parties and campaign groups. Political parties and individual politicians, including campaign groups and well-wishers sent messages to several mobile phones encouraging people to vote for their candidates. Some promotional messages were recorded such that once a mobile phone call is picked, the recorded voice of an aspirant making campaign promises is heard. However, some of the text messages were sent by people using phony names or campaign groups to hide their identity.

Some instances of mobile phone use during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria exist. In a particular polling center in Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria, a voter's phone rang; he picked it and placed it on speaker phone. The voice of a woman was heard shouting "vote umbrella, vote umbrella". The voice was not identified but from the message content, the message sponsor was suspected to be the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). One of the Abia state governorship candidates, Paul Ikonke of Action Congress of Nigeria sent numerous text messages to mobile phones one of which is this: "Abians as we approach Easter the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, may we also experience the resurrection of Abia as we vote ACN 4 Gov. *Abia Ga Di Mma Ozo* (Abia will be good Again)". Such messages were common during the 2011 general elections.

However, negative use of ICTs in political advertising was common during the 2011 general elections. The broadcast and print media were used by campaign groups to disparage other candidates they saw as threats. For instance, it was common to see posters bearing the image of a governorship or senatorial candidate placed on the same poster with for instance, former military president General Ibrahim Babangida (IBB). This was to create the impression that the candidate was an anti-democracy element, which is the assumed impression IBB portrays. Image manipulation or placement is a new communication technology. It is the "improper control of people's perception of a given reality through the use of pictures" (Pettersson, 2003, cited by Akashoro and Thanny, 2008, p. 446).

The adoption of ICTs to facilitate negative political advertising was commonly expressed through text messages sent to mobile phones. Some of such messages will say that a strong candidate has withdrawn, or that he is a secret cult member, and as such another candidate should be voted. Some of such messages even said that a particular candidate was dead. This was an unethical use of ICTs in political advertising which should be abhorred. In another instance, a faceless

group going by the name "Imo 4 God" sent this disparaging text message to Imo people concerning one of the governorship candidates, Chief Rochas Okorocha: "In 2 days of madness and lies, Rochas and his cult brought shame to Imo. Beware of Cult youths with green and yellow rubber bands on their wrist. Resist them". This is one among the numerous negative uses of ICTs in political marketing.

### ETHICS, ICTs AND POLITICAL ADVERTISING

Ethics is a set of behavioural and moral guides or codes which a person or group of individuals observe voluntarily as their mode of operation. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary sees ethics as moral principles that control or influence a person's behaviour. Various professional groups have code of ethics that guides the practice of that profession. This also applies to the field of advertising.

Ethical advertising means "doing what the advertiser believes is morally right for a given situation" (Arens & Bovee, 2004, p. 43). Advertisers, like all communicators should realize that they have a social responsibility to the society and should operate with the professional code of ethics guiding their profession. Sending political messages condemning other candidates is grossly unethical, and this constituted the bulk of SMS adverts during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria.

To understand the demands of professional ethics in advertising – whether political or non-political – , advertisers should ask the following questions once they come across ethical dilemmas:

1. Which course of action will produce the most good for the greatest number of people?
2. Will either course of action violate someone else's rights?
3. Will either course of action result in unfair treatment of any affected party? Arens & Bovee (2004). Answers to these questions provide an ethical guide for political advertisers.

It is pertinent to note that negative political advertising may not be in the interest of the sponsor of such message. Sharyne (1984) after a study, found that negative political advertising produces negative effect toward both the competitor and the sponsor of such message. This invariably means that engaging in negative political advertising could damage the reputation of both the sponsor and target of the message. For instance, during the 2011 governorship elections in Imo State, a group suspected to be in support of the incumbent governor at that time sponsored messages describing one of the main contenders of that position, Chief Rochas Okorocha as a member of the Ogboni society (a secret cult.). That message could be said to have backfired because chief Rochas who was a popular candidate and was favoured by many, ended up winning more sympathy from the electorate, and eventually winning the election. People could sympathize with a target of negative political advertising. The best way is to be morally guided in the use of ICTs in political advertising.

Though ICTs have made unethical political advertising easier with numerous digital picture manipulation processes now possible, advertisers should understand the far-reaching implications of unethical practices on the image of the profession. The need for truth in advertising is paramount. Singh (2009) writes that digital enhancement of any form is a lie. This then raises the question as to whether digital manipulation can be done within the ethical standards of advertising practice (Akahoro and Thanny, 2008).

For instance, in most states in Nigeria, posters and giant bill-boards of digitally enhanced mega cities and infrastructures - bridges, sky scrapers, roads etc. - are used by incumbent governors to advertise the progress supposedly made by their administration, even when the public know that such aesthetically beautiful structures do not exist. This practice is grossly unethical and unprofessional. Excessive exaggeration is aimed at deceiving the public and should be discouraged.

### CONCLUSION

Advertising, no doubt, is a key component of political communication. It is useful in political awareness creation, voter education, achieving good political behaviour and invariably leads to good governance. Exposure to political advertising, according to Sharyne's (1984) study, would affect voter evaluations of candidates and criteria for those evaluations. It was also revealed that negative political communication affects both the sponsor and target of the message. This means that the basic way to successfully adopt political advertising in campaigns is to play "safe and decent."

The Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) code of ethics states that advertising should not be conceived or delivered in a way that brings advertising into contempt or reduce public confidence in advertising (Oso, 2001). Use of ICTs in negative political advertising goes against this code and should be discouraged. The focus should be on how to harness the positive intentions for the invention of new communication technologies. As Idiong (2008, p. 244) writes, "Digital network (and indeed other ICTs) have the potential to broaden and enhance access to information and communication that can strengthen the process of democratization under transitional societies such as Nigeria." Similarly, the G-8 nations in the Okinawa Charter (2000) cited in Idiong (2008, p. 244) observe as follows concerning the use of ICTs in contemporary society:

*Our vision of an information society is one that better enables people to fulfill their potential and realize their aspirations. To this end we must ensure that IT serves the mutually supportive goals of ... enhancing the public welfare, and fostering social cohesion, and work to fully realize its potential to strengthen democracy, increase transparency and accountability in governance, promote human rights... and to foster international peace and stability (emphasis added).*

There is need for effective monitoring of ICT use in every kind of communication, including political advertising. The regulatory bodies such as APCON and Broadcast Organization of Nigeria (BON) should make further efforts in monitoring the media and practice of advertising. The profession should not be left unguarded, paving way for unscrupulous practitioners to reduce public confidence in advertising. The observation by Akashoro and Thanny (2008, p. 449) could suffice at this point:

*With the advancement in digital image, it is evident that there is no set of ethical standards and codes that can effectively curb excesses in use of photographs and images for advertising purposes. There is therefore the challenge of developing appropriate guidelines for advertising practitioners and policy makers.*

Political parties and politicians should also join hands in addressing the problem of negative political advertising. Members who engage in such acts should be sanctioned without waiting for regulatory bodies to take action. A holistic approach toward addressing this problem can bring about decent and ethical use of ICTs in political advertising. Empirical studies should be done in Nigeria to determine the effect of negative political advertising on electorates' perception of candidates and voting behaviour. This is one key way of discouraging negative political advertising in the country.

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