PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS DURING THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS AMONGACADEMIC STAFF OF A. B. U. ZARIA ELECTORATE

Omebije, Andrew Yusuf & Omebije Theophilus
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

ABSTRACT
This study is on perception of political advertisements during the 2015 general elections among the academic staff electorate of A. B. U. Zaria. The aim of the study is to evaluate the electorates' perception of political adverts of 2105 general elections and the influence these political adverts had on the electorates in the 2015 general elections. The objectives of the study, among others, include: evaluation of the electorates' perception of the tone of political advertising and the electorates' believability of these political advertisements. A survey research was conducted and the instrument for data collection was questionnaire. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted with a sample of 12 departments and a sample size of 120 respondents. The study, among others, finds that respondents perceived the tone of the political advertisement of 2015 general elections as negative and manipulative. Furthermore, the respondents did not assess the political adverts as credible and therefore did not believe these adverts. The study concludes that the negative tone of the political adverts led to the electorates' low believability of the adverts. The study recommends that political messages in advertisements should be issue-based and not that of calumny.

Introduction
For any nation to have a strong democratic system, mobilisation of the electorate and participation of the mobilised electorate in the democratic system is important. This is because democracy prides itself on popular representation of the will of the people. Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address defines democracy as "government of the people, by the people and for the people". It is therefore obvious that the people are the fulcrum in every democracy. Jega, (2014:1) observes that "one of the major requirements of liberal democracy is mobilisation and participation of the people in the process."

Similarly, Adeyanju (2014: 344) says "participation is the most central ingredient of democracy, as it makes it easy for the populace to be abreast of the process of decision-making, the decisions made and why they are made. "To this end, there area lot of advocacies to ensure effective participation of electorates before, during and after elections. The major channel of those advocacies is the media.

The media is a veritable tool for the dissemination of information to electorates. The major mandates of the media are to inform, educate and enlighten the public and these mandates increase greatly as election gets closer. Adeyanju (2014: 345) says "the mass media are veritable tools through which political parties mobilize the people for their cause." And Frere (2011:1) observes that "wherever tools of mass communication exist, they can play an important part in electoral contests, informing or mobilizing voters, or steering their votes."

Running up to all elections are campaigns in diverse forms and central to the purpose of political campaigns is the electorate participation. As such, the challenge for most political parties is: how do they gain the attention of the majority of the electorate in such a way that the perception of the electorates might be influenced; and how can this influenced perception culminate in electorates' votes at the polls? In this regard, the mass media has been proven to be the most singular instrument with the potential for maximum influence over a heterogeneous populace. According to Pate (2015: 6) "Every election [is] accompanied by numerous activities and excitement that involved the media in terms of coverage and advertising of the candidates, parties and their programmes."

Elections and the Media

The traditional role of the media in the society makes it compulsory for the media to act as the watch dog of the society and therefore report elections. Pate (2015) says “the reporting of elections is part of the surveillance function of the media in which the citizens are educated on the quality of the individual candidates presenting themselves for elective offices and warn the society of any impending danger with regards to the process of electing its leaders."!! is therefore the responsibility of the media to provide information to the electorates about the incumbent government as well as the opponents.

Frere (2011: 3) avers that "journalists have both the right and the duty to hold the government and the opposition to account for their achievements and possible shortcomings. Citizens must be informed about how the government has run the country since the previouselections and what alternatives have been proposed by the opposition during that time."

Also, during elections, there is increase in the use of the media by politicians to reach the electorates with their manifestoes. Meinardus (2003) explains that:

> Irrespective of ideological leanings, all politicians are keen on getting into the media. Every time they receive coverage in an article, have their face on television or their voice on radio, they assume that they increase their standing among potential voters. Although democratic elections should be about political choices, in most countries they are basically a popularity contest. And mass popularity comes with mass exposure.

This mass exposure comes with the mass media. According to Pate (2015: 6) "Every election [isl accompanied by numerous activities and excitement that involved the media in terms of coverage and advertising of the candidates, parties and their programmes." Thus, the media is critical in the organization and conduct of all elections in the country. As part of campaign strategy political stakeholders employ advertising to target the electorate.

Statement of Problem

If election is the fulcrum upon which democracy rests, and the conduct of regular elections is the complement to democracy, then political advertisements (pol ads) is one of the most popular instrument that candidates and political parties use to mobilize the electorate during electoral periods.(Olujide, Adeyemi, & Gbadeyan: 2011; Pate, 2015). This is indicated by the intense efforts political contestants put in place to woo electorates during times of election. (Omodia,

2009). During this time, political advertisements target the electorates in order to gain their votes. Thus, the perception of the electorate towards a candidate and his party is of utmost importance to political parties. According to Zisouli (2010)"political parties and candidates exchange promises for votes and through a communication process with voters, seek information from them to use in their political strategies". This shows that the electorate is at the essence of all political advertisements.

Although political advertisement is not a new concept, debate about the substantive impact and proper role is still on-going. In view of this, many studies have been conducted on the perception of the electoratestowards political advertisements: In a closely related research titled, "Nigerian Electorates' perception of political Advertising and election campaign" the authors focused on the most effective medium of political information dissemination and electorates' criteria for voting a political party or candidate. While some studies have looked at the electorate perception of online political advertisements, others have focused on electorates' perception of television pol ads and negative political ads (Asemah & Edegoh: 2012; Edegoh, Ezebuenyi, Asemah: 2013; Olujide, Adeyemi & Gbadeyan, 2011).

In a review study of the performance of the media during general elections, the result revealed that 64% of Nigerians adjudged the coverage as unfair among the various parties and candidates as against 34% that rated the performance fair. The study concluded that the coverage was characterized by partisanship in the public stations, high cost of media visibility and weak investigative and non-critical posture of media output (NBC, 2011). Equally, a study by the EU on the coverage of the 2011 Elections revealed lack of "balance towards the candidates and their parties, since 21 out of 63 parties contesting on the elections were mentioned during the NTA prime time, 80% of the coverage allocated to political actors was devoted to the PDF, 5% to ACN and CPC likewise. AIT followed a scheme similar to that of NTA while Channels TV was the only one that offered the most equitable coverage to political parties and presidential aspirants (Pate, 2015:7).

However, this study investigates the way electorates in Ahmadu Bello University (A.B.U) community perceive political advertisings trending in the media during the just concluded 2015 General Elections (GEs) and the influence on their voting behaviour.

Research Questions

1. How did electorate in A.B.U. Zaria perceive the tone of the 2015 General Election's political advertisements?
2. What is the level of believability of the political Advertisements of 2015 general elections among electorates in A.B.U Zaria?
3. To what extent do political advertisements influence the voting choice of electorates in A.B.U Zaria?

Advertising and Political Advertisements

Advertisements are all about enlightenment. Advertisements are deliberate, calculated and sustained. Advertisements are enlightenment technique paid for by an identified sponsor to cajole the public to subscribe to a product or ideology. This is also the exact overall objective of all forms of political campaigns. Edegoh, et al (2013: 3) maintains that:

> Advertising is the process of persuading potential customers to buy products or promote its services. It is the branch of marketing that deals with communicating to customers about products, brands and services. Advertising is a form of communication used to persuade an audience (viewers, readers or listeners) to take some action with respect to products, ideas or services.

Although political advertisement is a form of advertisements in general and social advertisements- which is a subset of social marketing- in particular, experts have distinguished the conduct of political advertisement from the general form of commercial advertisements. Olujide, Adeyemi and Gbadeyan (2011: 2) gave three points of differences between political and commercial advertising:

i. Political advertisers frequently engaged in "comparative" advertising in which the opposing candidates program and performance are criticized and even ridiculed. There is no comparable data for any commercial advert campaign; the "comparative" element is unlikely to be so prominent.
ii. Political advertisers do not adhere to any code or procedure intended to protect the public from the inaccurate and unsubstantiated claims but commercial advertisers voluntarily subscribe to a "code of advertising ethics"
iii. Political advertisers seek vote at any cost, even including a degraded sense of public regard for the candidates and the electoral process. Discouraging people from voting seems to be more feasible in political adverts than persuading supporters of one candidate to vote for the opponent. However, positivity is the currency of product advert.

Political advertisement, according to Robbs (2009) in Olujide, et al (2011: 2), is simply "the use of media by political candidates to increase their exposure to the public". Similarly, Asemah and Edegoh (2012: 249) cited Nwosu (1992:66) to the effect that "politicaladvertisement is a marketing function similar in intent and purpose to product marketing."Also, politicalAds involve canvassing for votes, which is a kind of political salesmanship. (Gana, 1992 in Asemah & Edegoh, 2012). The political stakeholders have come to the realization that in order to get the desired effect in the salesmanship of a candidate to the people, such candidate must be exposed- in the best possible way to a mass audience through the mass media. Mass popularity for politicians contesting for public offices in times of election is a function of mass exposure in the mass media (Meinardus, 2003).
Frére (2011:2) gave a simple, straight forward definition saying "political advertising is the advertising space sold by the media's commercial departments to contenders and parties for the diffusion of their campaign's promotional messages."

Political advertisement in the mass media is one of the strategies used during political campaigns. The fact that the mass media is used makes a lot of difference from every other form of enlightenment and mobilisation strategy. This is because ads which are placed in the mass media have the comparative advantage of reaching a heterogeneous audience per-thousand. This therefore makes advertisements the most viable platform on which political candidates reach the maximum number of electorates in times of elections.

Therefore, political advertisements especially during elections are placed in all the traditional media- television and radio; newspapers and magazines- and the 2011 general elections in Nigeria saw the increase in the use of the new media as a platform for political advertisements. Political advertisements encompasses all main and peripheral advertisements pertaining to the conduct of political campaigns and elections including information of candidates running for public offices, voters' education and enlightenment jingles, ballot measures and political activism. (Asemah and Edegoh, 2012; Edegoh, Ezebuenyi, Asemah: 2013: 2).This has made the media inseparable from political campaigns. In fact, modern politics is incomplete and non-accomplishable without political advertisements. Pate (2015: 6) says:

> Normally, elections are important news events that are of significant interest to the media because they are events that entail conflicts, disagreements and tensions. They are attractive societal events that the media cannot simply ignore because of their traditional responsibility of informing, educating and mobilizing the society for sustainable democracy and development.

Ethicality of Political Adverts during Election

By law, there are regulatory bodies in Nigeria that monitor the nature of advertisements in the media. The government often set out regulations imposing particular constraints on the media during elections (Frere, 2011). For instance the Nigeria Broadcasting Code and Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) act as watchdog of the media and advertisers. APCON ensures that all advertising, political advertisement inclusive, are in line with the laws and provisions of the council before they are placed in the media. Also, these bodies place sanctions and ban on adverts that do not conform to the standard of adverts in Nigeria.

Despite these provisions, the media and advertisers have at many times violated these codes. Pate (2015: 7) explains that "Government owned broadcast media outlets were fond of violating the provisions of the Electoral Act and the Nigeria Broadcasting Code, particularly in respecting the principles of pluralism, commercialization and equal airtime to all political parties during electioneering periods."

Ensuring that political adverts in the media are ethical is very important. This is to guard against malicious misinformation, hate speech, fake news, unfair allocation of time and space in the media and so on. According to Frere (2011) "for elections to occur under democratic conditions ... information has to be honest, fair and delivered in a responsible manner. “Also, for the electorate to believe advertisings messages, these adverts must be perceived to be truthful. Udeze and Akpan, (2013) says "for political advertising to be able to influence the electorates in their voting decision, the electorate must first accept the message in the advertisements as credible." Nzeribe (2012: 248) explains *"Truth* builds trust, a key element in our communication. *Trust* is the relationship between the candidate and the electorate". Because political advertisings are powerful means of communicating messages and have the ability to influence our perception, APCON strongly believes that advertisement must be practiced honestly, decently, truthfully by all. (Adeniyi-Williams, 1995).

However, Nzeribe, (2012: 248) says "even in ordinary pol. discourse, we have tended to be abusive; directing attacks (verbal and physical) on individuals rather than issues; preferring to be

evasive of core issues of electorates' participation. 'The consequence is political messages in adverts will be negative, calumny and manipulative. Electorate.

Perception of Political Adverts

The framing of media messages including advertisements has a way of influencing the audience. This influence may not be direct as the hypodermic bullet theory may suggest however, the media messages can provide valuable information especially for a voting population. According to Frere (2011) "A voting citizen needs to be properly informed, in order to be able to decide who will best represent his or her interests and views." The level of influence political information can have on the electorate depends on the perception of the electorates to such information. The fact is the audience can choose what they expose themselves to in the media. Also, the perception of the audience to the content in the media can be a deliberate, calculated and conscious decision.

In a study by Udeze & Akpan (2013), they attributed the electorates' perception of political ads as truthful and credible to be the result of the electorates' docile background. They said the electorates are being "a simple, naive, uncritical public easily swayed by pomp and pageantry or showmanship which is embedded in advertising."

Similarly, Edegoh, Ephraim &Asemah (2013:1) reached the conclusion in their study of political ads during Anambra state election that "the influence of television political advertising on electorates is such that it makes the voters to recall the advertised candidate and that it persuasively generates in voters, preference for the advertised candidate."

Therefore, despite the presence of numerous political information especially political adverts in the media during the 2015 general elections, the audience can perceive these adverts to be negative or manipulative, positive or issue-based. In this study, the perception of the audience to political adverts is measured in three ways: one, the electorates' perception of the tone of the political adverts; two, the electorates' believability of the political adverts and three, voting influence of the political adverts on the electorate.
The tone of the political adverts in this study is measured by the way the audience perceive the content of the political adverts. The tone of the messages is measured on the basis of whether the political adverts were issue-based; meaning did the pol ads address concrete socio-economic and developmental issues or were the pol ads manipulative or negative by attacking opponents or appealing to tribal and religious sentiments of the electorates.

The electorates' believability of the political adverts in this study is considered to be the extent to which the electorates accept and agree with the political adverts of the 2015 general elections.

The third parameter of measuring the perception of the electorate of political adverts of 2015 general elections is whether these pol ads influenced their decision to participate in the 2015 general elections and whom to vote for.

Theory- Uses **and Gratification**

The study is anchored on the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). UGT is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. UGT is an audience-centred approach to understanding mass communication. UGT focuses on "what do people do with media?" This is unlike other media effect theories which ask the question "what does media do to people?" UGT discusses how users deliberately choose media that will satisfy given needs and allow one to enhance knowledge, relaxation, social interactions/companionship, diversion, or escape. The theory assumes that audience members are not passive consumers of media. Rather the audience has power over their media consumption and assumes an active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own

lives. (Katz, Jay & Michael, 2011) Furthermore, UGT holds that audiences are responsible for choosing media to meet their desires and needs to achieve gratification. This implies that the media compete against other information sources for viewers' gratification. (Baran & Davies, 2009). In this study, the electorates- which are the target audience of every pol ads-have the ability to choose which media to expose themselves to and more so, how to interpret the pol ads they get exposed to.

Methodology

The study employs the survey research method. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire. In the method of data gathering, the study adopts stratified random sampling technique. A.B.U was grouped into 12 strata which constituted the 12 faculties in the university. From each stratum, one department was randomly selected making a total of 12 departments. The population of academic staff in A.B.U. is about 2000 according to A.B.U. Self-Evaluation Report (SER, 2012). The sample size of the study is 120 respondents and ten questionnaires were administered to each of the selected department.

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine declined accepting the questionnaire, also Faculty of Environmental Design and Agriculture both returned nine questionnaires. Therefore, the working sample of this study is 108 respondents.

Results and Discussions

Research Question One:

How did the electorate in A.B.U. Zaria perceive the tone of the2015 General Election's political adverts?

Electorates' perception of Tone of political Adverts	**Frequency**
Manipulative/ negative tone	52% (n=56)
Informative/ positive tone	45% (n=49)
No response	3% (n=3)
Total	100% (n= 108)

Table 1 showing electorates' perception of tone of political adverts in the 2015 General Election

As stated earlier, the tone of the adverts were divided into two: manipulative and informative. The manipulative tone was coded as negative, whereas the informative tone was coded positive. Responses which indicated that the political adverts had tribal or religious sentiments or attacked political opponents or parties were coded as manipulative or negative tone. Whereas in cases where the respondents indicated that the political adverts were issue-based according to the manifestoes of good governance such tone was considered as informative or positive. Table 1 shows that 52% of the respondents viewed the 2015 general elections' political adverts in the Nigerian media as manipulative, while a little above 45% adjudged the tone of the pol ads in the media to be informative. Majority of the respondents considered the political adverts to be smear campaign or campaign of calumny in which issues of good governance were not clearly highlighted. Most of the electorates believe the tone of the political ads attacked opponents rather than address the items on the party manifestoes.

Research Question Two: what is the level of believability of the political Advertisements of 2015 general elections among electorates in A.B.U Zaria?

Political Adverts of the 2015 General Elections were believable and persuasive				
Strongly Agreed	**Agreed**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Total**
!4%(n=15)	30% (n=32)	9% (n=10)	47% (n=51)	100%(n=108)

Table 2: showing respondents' believability of political adverts of 2015 General Election For a message to be believed and persuasive, the electorate must have perceived the message to be credible. The electorates' believability of the pol ads is the ultimate goal of every political advertiser. In this vein, just above 47% and nearly 9% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree respectively with the assertion that the pol ads in the Nigerian media during the 2015 general elections were believable. While just above 14% and 30% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that the pol ads were believable (see table 2). This response is not surprising as majority of the respondents had indicated that the tone of the pol ads were manipulative, therefore it is obvious that they might not believe the content of those pol ads. Thus, 56% of the respondents disbelieve the pol ads in the Nigerian media during the general elections and were not persuaded by them. This is due to the high presence of negative ads and manipulated messages in the pol ads in the media.

Udeze & Akpan (2013) has attributed the electorates' perception of pol ads as truthful and credible to be the result of the electorates' docile background. He said the electorates are being "a simple, naive, uncritical public easily swayed by pomp and pageantry or showmanship which is embedded in advertising." However, the sampled electorates in this study- which are mainly from the academia-cannot be described in the same light as those in Udeze and Akpan's study.

In this study the response of the sampled electorates show that they did not believe the messages in the advertisements and were therefore not persuaded.

Research Question Three: To what extent did the political advert of 2015 general election influence the voting decision of electorates in A.B.U community?

For political advertising to be able to influence the electorates in their voting decision, the electorate must first accept the message in the advertisements as credible (Udeze and Akpan, 2013). The findings of the study show that 26% of the respondents indicated that pol ads informed them on the candidate they already had in mind to vote; 13% said pol ads actually changed their decision on whom to vote; 31% maintained that pol ads educated them on the manifestoes of various parties and candidates and 27%, said pol ads had no effect at all on them. The above findings show that the political adverts of 2015 general elections influenced 13% of the respondents in their choice of whom to vote. 57% of the respondents used the political adverts as a source of information to know the candidates and parties but claim did not influence their decision to vote or whom to vote for. Finally, 27% admit that though they were exposed to political ads, it did not serve as a source of information nor did it influence their decision to vote or candidate to be voted for.

These findings show that the electorates do not believe that political adverts they expose themselves to have influence on the candidate or party they vote for at the polls. In fact majority of the respondents believe that advertisement serves as a means of information about various political parties and candidates but do not influence who they vote for. Udeze & Akpan (2013) in a study on electorates in Imo state stated that respondents were "influenced in their choice of candidates to the extent that they (the electorates) perceived the messages in the pol ads as credible." Therefore, it can be understood that if electorates do not perceive the messages in political adverts to be credible, then they are likely not to be influenced fay the political adverts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the sampled electorates within A.B.U. Zaria considered the tone of the political adverts of 2015 general elections in the media to be manipulative and negative. Consequently, they did not believe these political adverts sufficiently enough to be persuaded. And because they were not persuaded by the political adverts, it did not affect their decision to vote or the candidate and party they voted for.

The findings of this study contradicts that of Edegoh, Ephraim &Asemah (2013) who reached the conclusion in their study of political ads during Anambra state election that "the influence of television political advertising on electorates is such that it makes the voters to recall the advertised candidate and that it persuasively generates in voters, preference for the advertised candidate."

Recommendations

The study recommends that political advertisers should create adverts with messages of sound manifestoes and negative messages. It is believed that if the electorates' perceive the messages in political adverts as positive and more credible, then it might have the potential to influence a greater margin of the electorates in their voting decisions. Therefore political advertisements should be issue-based and not of calumny.

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