

POLITICAL ADVERT CAMPAIGNS AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR: A STUDY OF AKINWUNMI AMBODE'S ELECTION AD CAMPAIGNS IN LAGOS STATE.

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, the use of political advert campaigns has become increasingly popular; this was evident in the just concluded 2015 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state. From billboards with obvious slogans, to jingles which took up both radio and television air spaces, ad campaigns by several candidates dominated the media. However the extent to which these ad campaigns influence voting behaviour is unclear. This led the researcher to seek to understand the role political advertising plays in the voting behavior of electorates in order to discover if political ad campaigns actually influences the voter's choice of candidate or not. This paper specifically examined political ad campaigns of the All Progressive Congress (APC) gubernatorial candidate in Lagos state, Akinwunmi Amobde. A field survey of eligible voters in Lagos State was carried out to further ascertain the efficacy of political ad campaigns on the electorates. From the field survey, results were collated, analyzed and summarized using simple frequency tables. Findings from the study showed that political ad campaigns have a minimal effect on electorate's voting behaviour but still plays a role in the electoral process. This study recommended that political candidates and parties should concentrate on other election campaign strategies and for further studies to be carried out to better understand other existing factors that actually influence voting behaviour.

Keywords: political ad campaigns, electorates, voting behaviour

Introduction

For any democratic system to thrive, it is vital that political parties and candidates provide the electorates with adequate information on party policies, clear-cut vision as well as their political agendas to enable electorates actively choose their candidates based on full information. To achieve this, political parties use the media in campaigns. Curran (2005:129) adds that the media assists voters to make an informed choice at election time. This is done in form of paid political

advertising, social media campaigns, commentaries and news stories. In fact, for an election to be considered free and fair, electorates must have adequate knowledge of the candidates, political parties and election policies

Recently, political parties and their candidates are becoming increasingly aware of the effectiveness of advertising and its role in getting the electorates to choose a particular candidate or party over the other by way of informing them. The use of political ad campaigns has become increasingly popular and is very important to the electoral process and voting behavior because it bridges the communication gap between political parties, political candidates and electorates. Hence, political parties and candidates all around the world devote a lot of financial resources to political ad campaigns to sell themselves as the preferred brand to the electorates. Interestingly, the most questions raised in elections are concerned with voting behavior i.e. why the electorates voted for a candidate over the other and the implication of their choice.

Scholars and communication experts argue that, when the politician crafts his campaign messages as being the fight to improve voters' lives, or something similar and come with some good measure of integrity, the voters are more likely to believe him (Feyipitan 2015). In other words, the electorates are most likely to trust candidates whose political ad campaigns offer to satisfy their basic needs as opposed to those who dwell on their personal achievements. However, these same experts also argue that personality, appearance and language use play crucial roles in political ad campaigns. Still, many political experts question the efficacy of political ad campaigns in getting the electorates to vote in a candidate's favour.

The recently concluded 2015 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state, witnessed political parties and candidates flooding various forms of media with ad campaigns all struggling to win electorates' votes. At the end, Akinwunmi Abode who was the candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC) emerged as the governor of Lagos State. Before the elections, his ad campaigns filled media airwaves, social media and billboards with messages for every class of people who made up the electorates. His pervasive jingles dominated radio and television stations, social media sites while his messages streamed the print and outdoor media with promises to deliver. However, the extent to which his media campaigns fostered his win remains unknown.

Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent were the electorates influenced by Ambode's Ad campaigns?
2. What was the most effective strategy employed in Ambode's Ad campaigns?
3. To what extent did exposure to Ambode's Ad campaigns facilitate his win in the 2015 Lagos state gubernatorial elections?

Literature Review

2.1 Political Advertising Campaigns in Nigeria

The fact that the mass media even through advertising, continues to pervade our daily lives have continued to be established by various scholars and communication experts alike. In politics, advert campaigns have become an essential tool used amongst candidates contesting for various positions to get the electorates to vote for them. Advertising and public relations occupy the centre-stage of promotion of political candidates and parties vying for different political positions during campaigns (Samaila 2003). Over the last several decades, political advertising has changed significantly. Lyengar and Simon (2000) state that, Political advertising is increasingly the main element in political campaigns, rendering party machines and grass-root organizations less important than they were in the past. Diamond and Bates in 1992 also posit that, unlike political campaigns in the past, advances in media technology have streamlined the process, giving candidates more options to reach larger groups of constituents with little effort. According to boundless.com (2015), the growth of political advertising especially in the United States of America can be attributed to cable television networks and the internet. It states that;

“...The growth of cable television networks heavily influenced political advertising in the 1992 election between incumbent President George H. W. Bush and Governor Bill Clinton, particularly in reaching new target demographics such as women and young voters. The 2004 election saw yet another, and possibly the biggest, change yet in political advertising--the growth

of the Internet. Web-based advertising was easily distributed by both incumbent President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry's campaigns, and both campaigns hired firms who specialized in the accumulation of personal data. This resulted in advertisements which were tailored to target specific audiences for the first time (a process known as narrowcasting)”.

In Nigeria, political advertising has grown immensely in the past two decades. This is as a result of the recent awareness by political parties and their candidates on the usefulness of advertising in making the electorates better aware of the candidates as a better brand and in communicating their offerings in form of manifestoes to these same electorates. Olujide et al (2010) note that, advertising have become the most commonly used technique to create a favourable image for the candidate and a negative image for the opponent. Before now, political parties and candidates channeled most of their resources into political rallies, speeches and direct contact to gather the support of electorates, as noted by Opeibi (2004).

Between the 2007, 2011 and most recent 2015 elections in Nigeria; presidential and gubernatorial, the use of political advert campaigns have widened from mode of delivery, type of language used, to forms of media used to communicate these messages. The 2007 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state witnessed the flood of both traditional and new media with media campaigns of the three strong contenders who were; Babatunde Fashola of AD, Musuliu Obanikoro of PDP and a fresh face, Jimi Agbaje of Accord. Because of the popularity of these three candidates amongst the electorates, campaigns became highly competitive. Each candidate tried to outdo the other using political advert campaigns. They came up with various jingles .i.e :..everybody loves Jimi Agbaje...”,slogans like “....Ekoonibaje o” amongst others. Also, according to Nworah (2011), the 2011 presidential election between former president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the PDP and General Muhammadu Buhari of the CPC had its peculiarities. In the sense that, Since Goodluck Ebele Jonathan had not been elected president during his first term, he was saddled with the responsibility of convincing the electorates that he was a better choice than his strongest opponent. This he did by investing a lot of funds into media campaigns which included traditional media and the new media.

Even though it is generally agreed by most scholars and marketing professionals that political advertising is important to every election campaign, yet some scholars and political consultants remain divided on the extent to which political advertising influence voting behaviour. In the past most political campaign researchers agreed that political media campaigns had a great effect on voting behaviour. However, recent studies have shown a better understanding on the effectiveness of political advertising communication in elections. Hoolbrooks (1996) concluded that, “variations in candidate support during the campaign season are largely attributable to the occurrence of campaign events”. In support, Ansolabhere and Iyenga (1994) state that political advertising is persuasive and not manipulative and that its messages inform voters about the candidates’ position and allow voters to develop differentiated images of the candidates.

Interestingly, Nigerian electorates are becoming ever more exposed to political advertising a lot more than in the past which in turn raises awareness on political decisions before they are taken. Electorates are becoming more aware about political information; information about candidates and their manifestos, party policies and election guidelines through continuous use of political advertising in election campaigns in Nigeria.

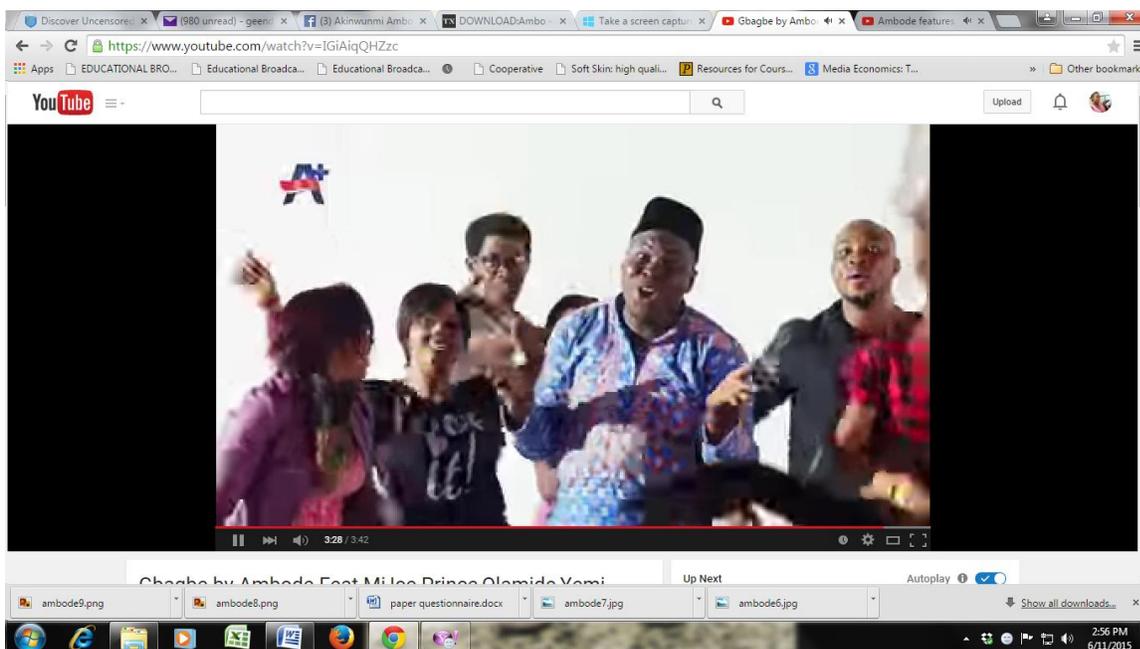
2.2 Akinwunmi Ambode’s Ad Campaigns In Lagos State

The just concluded elections in Nigeria especially in Lagos state witnessed massive use of both traditional media and new media on election campaigns. It was apparent that candidates and political parties devoted a fortune on media ad campaigns in order to inform, educate and gather support from the electorates. In Lagos state, the gubernatorial candidate of the All Progressive Congress (APC) Akinwunmi Ambode did not fall short of using widespread and consistent media ad campaigns. His campaigns flooded radio stations, television stations, social media, newspapers, billboards and posters. His campaigns were very well celebrity based and also presented people of different social class; from the extremely elite to the common trader.

Most popular to his campaign were his theme songs; “I believe” and “Gbabe” which were both studded with Nigerian celebrities. These campaigns explored celebrity endorsements and

emotions to appeal specifically to the younger electorates. For the “I believe” video, every social class and ethnic background were adequately represented. They all chorused “I believe” in unity with a few people stating why they each believed in Lagos and the Ambode dream. Ambode who was the character in focus ended the campaign with “I believe together we can build the Lagos of our dreams”. From an article culled from The Nation Newspapers (2015), Ambode is described as a core democrat who rallies the people in the “I believe” video singing, “I believe in the power of you and I. I believe together, we’ll fly. I believe in the power that comes from a world brought together as one.”

However the “Gbabe” theme song rocked the radio and television more than the “I believe” theme song. This was probably because “Gbabe” was a much more “catchy” song with danceable beat. Daily, in between radio/television commercials “... Ambo oooo Ambo, Ekosese bereni o Ambo, GBABE...” which could be translated to mean “...Ambo ooooo Ambo, Eko is just starting o Ambo, GET IT..” was constantly played. The song was sung by almost everyone whether supporter or not, young or old, elite or not in most parts of Lagos, it was very pervasive.



Text 1: “Gbabe” video. Source: YouTube



Text 2: “I believe” video. Source: YouTube

Akiwunmi Ambode’s Ad campaigns were not only present on broadcast media; the print media, outdoor media and new media where equally employed. He appeared in different outfits and had several messages which appealed to different types of audiences but was prominently youth focused. His ad campaigns and messages were drawn to suit a specific crowd; he was dressed as an Igbo man, dressed as a sports man, dressed in a suit and tie, addressed Christians and Muslims as well. To further reiterate his love for children, his ad campaigns were also highly focused on children. However, awash with different messages across board, Ambode’s Unique Selling Point was clear; he promised competence and continuity. In addition to celebrity endorsements, a challenge was also put up which was tied to his theme song. Members of the public were asked to come with their own versions of the ‘theme song’ in exchange for a music deal with one of the celebrities who endorsed Ambode and a grand prize to shoot the musical video. The combination of posters, billboard ads and his theme song which rocked every radio and television made it a tough race for Ambode’s opponents to keep up with.



Text 3: Poster and billboard ads

Theoretical Framework

The scientific study of voting behaviour can be classified into three research schools which include; the sociological model which focuses on influences of social factor, the psychosocial model which believes that party identification is the major factor behind voting behaviour and the rational choice theory which is also referred to as a model of economic voting. However, this study is underpinned on the sociological model of voting behaviour by Lazarsfeld et al in 1944.

The theoretical assumptions of the sociological model are identified in three works which include; **“The people’s choice”** (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944), **“Voting”** (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954) and **“Personal Influence”** (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). This research conducted by Lazarsfeld in 1944 was carried out using the questionnaire for the first time in the study of the US presidential elections. According to Rossi (1964), Paul Lazarsfeld, whose

previous interests had focused on the study of the psychological mechanisms involved in the processes of choice and in the effects of publicity, advertising and mass media on consumer behavior had two main objectives in this research: to study the effects of exposure to the media, that is, to know how voters arrive at their decisions and the role of media in this process; and to test a new methodology of successive interviews with a panel of subjects and a control group. The study began by characterizing the supporters of the two main political parties in the U.S. using a panel of 600 subjects who were interviewed seven times over the seven months of campaign, to then identify the voters who changed their position during the campaign period, comparing three groups: those who decided their vote before beginning the campaign, those whose decision was taken during the party convention and those that decided their vote only at an advanced stage of the campaign Antunes (2010).

The premise of this theory by Lazarsfeld et al in 1944 was centered on that fact that voting is an individual choice which is largely affected by the voter's personality and the voter's exposure to the media. That is, voters choice of candidates are greatly influenced by the amount of media they are exposed to and the kind of persons they are. In the case of Akinwunmi Ambode, this explains his immense use of political ad campaigns to influence voters' choice in his favour because it is common knowledge that both media and advertising are pervasive in nature and influences its audience to behave in a certain way.

Methodology

To get a better understanding on how political Ad campaigns influence voting behaviour, both purposive sampling technique and simple random technique were used. This is because a simple random sample gives every member of the population an equal opportunity to be chosen. This technique was chosen because a study sample is supposed to be an unbiased representation of the population under study. This gave the opportunity for every class, age group, gender to be equally represented in the sample. Since this study is an assessment of Akinwunmi Ambode's Ad campaigns in the 2015 Lagos state gubernatorial elections, eligible voters in the state were studied.

A 12-itemed questionnaire was used as research instrument for this study. 200 copies of this questionnaire were distributed randomly using Google forms which is an easy to use online

survey platform. The use of Google forms made it easier to reach respondents in different locations of Lagos state which in turn made a fair representation of eligible voters all around the state. Out of the 200 copies administered, 180 were correctly filled and submitted.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows that respondents who were between the ages of 18 and 27 were 14.6%, 28 and 37 56.9%, 38 and 47 17.1%, 48 and 57 8.9%, while respondents 58 and above were 2.4%.

Variables	No of Respondents	Percentage %
Age		
18-27	27	14.6
28-37	103	56.9
38-47	31	17.1
48-57	16	8.9
58 and above	3	2.4
Total	180	100
Gender		
Male	86	47.6
Female	94	52.4
Total	180	100
If active in the 2015 Lagos state gubernatorial elections		
Yes	94	52.4
No	86	47.6
Total	180	100
How involved		
Very active	23	13.1
Active	61	33.6
Passive	64	35.2
Indifferent	32	18
Total	180	100

Exposure to Ambode's Ad campaigns		
Yes	159	88.3
No	21	11.7
Total	180	100
Medium of exposure		
Billboards	72	59.5
Posters	76	62.8
Radio adverts	73	60.3
Television adverts	72	59.5
Newspaper adverts	41	33.9
Social media adverts	54	44.6
Ads remembered whether or not heard or seen		
Billboards	46	37.7
Posters	41	33.6
Radio adverts	65	53.3
Television adverts	53	43.4
Newspaper adverts	9	7.4
Social media adverts	28	23
Reason for remembering ads		
They were interesting	27	22.3
His appearance appealed to me	17	14
You believed his promises	12	9.9
They were everywhere, I got used to them	53	43.8
His theme song stuck in my head	73	60.3
Indifferent	3	2.5
Influence on voting for Ambode		
Yes	38	21.1
No	86	48
Total	56	30.9
	180	100

If Ambode's Ad campaigns were better than that of his opponents.		
Yes	68	37.7
No	63	35.2
Not sure	38	21.3
Other	11	5.7
	180	100
If campaigns fostered his victory		
Yes	40	22.3
No	99	54.5
Not sure	41	23.1

Out of the 180 filled questionnaire, 47.6% were male while 52.4% were female. 52.4% percent agreed to have been active in the gubernatorial elections while 47.6% said they were not active. In terms of how involved there were, 13.1% were very active, 33.6% percent were active, 35.2% were passive with 18% being indifferent. 88.3% affirmed that they were exposed to Akinwunmi Ambode's Ad campaigns while 11.7% were not exposed.

Table 2 also shows that 59.5% of the respondents were exposed to billboard adverts, 62.8% were exposed to posters, 60.3% were exposed to radio adverts, 59.5% were exposed to television adverts, 33.9% were exposed to newspaper adverts while 44.6% percent were exposed to social media adverts. As for adverts which were always remembered by the respondents, 37.7% chose billboards, 33.6% chose posters, 53.3% chose radio adverts, 43.4% percent chose television adverts, 7.4% chose newspaper adverts while 23% chose social media adverts. 22.3% of respondents remembered Ambode's ad campaigns because they were interesting, to 14% his appearance was appealing, 9.9% believed his promises, 43.8% got used to them because the adverts were everywhere, 60.3% said his theme song stuck in their heads while 2.5% were indifferent.

Regarding whether their choice to vote for or against Ambode was influenced by the adverts, 21.1% of the respondents said they were influenced, 48% were not influenced while 30.9% were indifferent. 37.7% of respondents thought Ambode's Ad campaigns were better than that of his opponents, 35.2% thought it wasn't, 21.3% were not sure while 5.7% thought it was others. Was Ambode's win fostered by his Ad campaigns? 22.3% person said yes, 54.5% percent said no while 23.1% were not sure.

Research Question one

To what extent were the electorates influenced by Amode's Ad campaigns?

A large number of respondents (48%) said they were not influenced by Ambode's Ad campaigns while another large percentage were indifferent, leaving only 21.1% of those who agreed to have been influenced by the Ad campaigns.

This finding suggests that the electorates were minimally influenced by Ambode's Ad campaigns which invariably mean that political Ad campaigns have minimal effect on electorates' voting behaviour. So irrespective of whether political candidates advertise or not, the electorates have a preconceived choice of candidate and exposure to Ad campaigns of other contestants does little in changing that preconceived choice. Their conviction could most likely be as a result of party affiliation, word of mouth, strong opinion leader, simple personal appeal or other unknown factors.

This ultimately contradicts Lazarsfeld et al (1944) sociological model of voting behaviour which states that the electorates are influenced by exposure to the media.

Research Question Two

What was the most effective strategy employed in Ambode's Ad campaigns?

Even though a large percentage of respondents were not influenced by Ambode's Ad campaigns a whopping 60.3 percent of them had Ambode's theme songs stuck in their head which could have been "I believe" or "Gbabe" or both of them.

Simply put, this means that political advertising still plays some role in voting behaviour. It further emphasizes that political advertising's effect could be subliminal (without the receiving

electorate being aware of its effect) or conscious (with the electorate being fully aware of the effect). 43.8% of respondents also stated that Ambode's Ad campaigns were everywhere, so they had no choice but got used to them. This also emphasizes the pervasive nature of advertising; whether they were interested in them or not, they received them anyway which shows how advertising is.

Interestingly, this finding also suggests that radio and television are still very powerful media of advertising. This coming from the fact that the Ambode's theme song was very popular because they were played on both radio and television stations. From respondents, the use of theme songs in political Ad campaigns is excellent strategy by Akinwunmi Ambode.

Research Question Three

To what extent did exposure to Ambode's Ad campaigns facilitate his win in the 2015 Lagos state gubernatorial elections?

Also interesting is that, 48% respondents were of the opinion that Ambode's Ad campaigns did not foster his victory in the 2015 gubernatorial elections. 21.1% believed his Ad campaigns fostered his win while 30.9% were indifferent. Going by the finding on the effect of Ambode's Ad campaigns on voting behaviour; that is, it has minimal effect on voting behaviour, it is safe to say that Akinwunmi's Ad campaigns did not foster his win.

This means that the choice of candidate is based on other factors totally independent of political Ad campaigns. It is also important to note that some respondents also chose reasons like; continuity, political pedigree, party affiliation, experience as reasons why he was a preferred candidate while other reasons like; plain preference of opponent, dissatisfaction with party affiliation remained why he was the wrong choice of candidates to others.

Conclusion

This study was aimed at understanding political Ad campaigns and voting behaviour and evaluating the effect of Akinwunmi Ambode's political Ad campaigns on the voting behaviour of electorates in the just concluded 2015 gubernatorial elections. To further understand this, a field study was carried out using a simple questionnaire to gather opinions of eligible voters in Lagos state.

Results from the survey reveal that it is no doubt that political advertising plays some role in influencing the electorates. However, this effect is minimal and could be a conscious effect or subliminal effect. From this, it is inferred that political Ad campaigns have minimal effect on voting behaviour. In addition political Ad campaigns remain pervasive which still make s it useful in the election campaign process; and radio and television still remain the most effective means of advertising. The study also concludes that using theme songs in political ad campaigns are very effective in seizing the electorates' attention which could in turn mean change of choice of candidate.

From these findings, it is recommended that political candidates should invest more on other election campaign strategies instead of investing huge funds on political Ad campaigns. This does not mean that political candidates should ignore ad campaigns totally. However, it is important that candidates use the most effective means possible to influence voting behaviour.

In addition, after political candidates and parties have chosen the best media to reach out to electorates which are most likely radio and television, they should also consider using the “theme song’ strategy just like Akinwunmi Ambode used in order to gain measurable popularity. Further studies should also be carried out to understand other factors that actually influenced voting behaviour.

Finally, this study suggests that electorates should be open to receive political advertising information so that they can make better informed choices. Sticking to a party or candidate they have chosen from the start may mean that they will not get the chance to understand or see the strengths of other candidates who may actually be the better option.

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