

Influence of Outdoor Political Advertising Media used by Gubernatorial Aspirants on the Electorate in Benue State

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Abstract

This study assessed the influence of outdoor political advertising media used by gubernatorial aspirants in Benue State. Survey research design was adopted using questionnaire and oral interview as data collection instruments. The study's major findings indicated that outdoor political advertising media were extensively used by gubernatorial aspirants during the 2015 gubernatorial elections campaigns. Branded cars, billboards, posters, handbills, pole flags, campaign T-Shirts and banners were ascertained to have been widely used. The study equally found that outdoor political advertising media used in the 2015 elections campaigns were largely perceived to be efficient. The study, however, realized that activities of vandals, poor aesthetic quality, susceptibility of outdoor media to bad weather and lack of factual information about some political aspirants were perceived challenges to outdoor political advertising. In tandem with major findings, the study recommended that collaborative efforts should be made by security agents in the state with outdoor advertising regulatory bodies and the media during electioneering campaigns to tackle the challenges affecting optimal efficiency of outdoor political advertising use. Also, adequate research and education about appropriate outdoor political advertising use should be done by campaign coordinators during electoral campaigns for their principals. This, if addressed would enhance the optimal efficiency of outdoor political advertising media and will go a long way to affect positively Nigeria's electoral process.

Key Words: Influence, Advertising, Outdoor Political Advertising Media, & Electorates

Introduction

Advertising is a communication tool of marketing, public relations, and promotional management, social and political mobilization. It is the primary source of revenue for the mass media in a free market economy. It has not only become an integral part of man's social, political and economic life, but has also grown both as business activity and as a profession. In modern society advertising pervades our daily lives to the extent that Malickson and Nason (2001) state that the average person is exposed to hundreds of advertising messages between the time he opens his eyes in the morning and clicks off his light at night. In the newspapers, magazines, outdoor posters, handbills and direct mails; on radio, television, and the internet as well as in cinema houses, we are, daily confronted with a myriad of advertisements. Thus Belch and Belch (2003) reiterate that advertising is the best-known and most widely discussed form of promotion probably because of its pervasiveness. It is a very important promotional tool particularly for

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companies whose products and services are targeted at mass consumer markets. The basic ingredient of advertising, therefore, is its ability to inform and persuade. Okwechima (2009) collaborates that, “ advertising could be employed as a marketing tool to show how one politician or party is different from another and to direct voters to vote for candidates of their choice” (p.203).

A political process involves rational choices by voters, which must be based on information. Journalism and advertising are important source of such information. Just as early product advertisements were not much more than simple messages about the availability of a brand, its price and function or use so too can today’s political advertising endeavour be seen as an important means of informing the electorates about a political candidate and what they are offering their constituency as enshrined in their manifestoes. Therefore political advertising can serve as a positioning technique to show how a politician or party is different from another through the unique options they can offer, by way of vision and mission set to accomplish, if elected. In this respect, political advertising should direct voters to political ideas and avail voters with information about the candidates aspiring for political offices. Okwechima (2009) hence affirms that there are significant ways in which political advertising by virtue of the nature of its product or brand differs from commercial advertising. However, their strategies are basically the same.

As a tool of marketing, political advertising involves a persuasive strategic plan that could be designed to avail electorates with information aimed at influencing their voting choice in election situation and the use of outdoor political advertising in elections contest is widely acclaimed by scholars as Audu (2015) observes that:

Political advertisement has become increasingly fascinating as politicians and advertising consultants unite to deploy creative copies and signages that would not only attract public attention, but also appeal to their emotions, aimed at garnering their votes. As political campaigns ads have become the latest exciting features of major cities across the country, the use of framed-out-of home tactic, ooh boards are being extensively deployed in a new era of creative thinking in the communications industry (p.16).

Political aspirants who vie for political positions in Nigeria take to outdoor advertising media in a bid to win electorates’ votes. This therefore informs Nwanejuafor’s (2015) position that outdoor advertising has proven to be one efficient media for creating awareness and public enlightenment for any given cause – especially political campaigns over time. According to Nwanuejafor, the use of outdoor advertising for political campaigns dated back to the 19th century, with the use of posters, which was the most common form of outdoor advertising then. Shruthi (2013) stresses that today’s outdoor media of advertising are nothing but a refinement of the ancient method of delivering a message to a large group of people. This has been born out of the conviction that a human being spends a third of his life outdoors. There are millions of commuters travelling by cars, bikes, buses, trains and taxis. Outdoor advertising makes the travelling of these millions of people entertaining on the road. And today’s politician cannot

avoid this media strategy of reaching electorates at the lowest cost per thousand, so to reiterate. Outdoor advertising has some unique advantages which stand out against other traditional media channels thus making it a virile tool that could be utilized by politicians in political campaigns. Ajayi (2005) elaborates that:

Outdoor advertising offers room for versatility and flexibility, big corporate impact, comes in colour as an attractive medium and perhaps with a wide coverage as involuntary medium to audience. Other advantages of outdoor advertising use encompass its low cost, micro-targeting as a permanent reminder or repeated exposure (p.39).

According to Davidson (2001), the outdoor media is arguably the most effective way of communicating with third world elements of African population. There are masses of people residing in rural areas who do not have access to television neither do they buy or read newspapers and magazines. But they are exposed to outdoor advertising as they walk along; at their local trading stores in the rural areas and at shopping complexes in the townships and more avenues. This implies that outdoor political advertising could be utilized to inform, educate, persuade and mobilize even the illiterate populations on the need for them to exercise their franchise with informed minds.

Audu (2015) similarly cashed in by stressing that in Nigeria, it is still a liberty enjoyed by politicians and billboard agencies are relishing the patronage. Of all the advertising methods, outdoor advertising is one of the most powerful ways of reaching the target publics. It is a tried-and true method of getting messages to the masses in targeted geographical areas. Audu further stresses that the interest of outdoor media to politicians in most part of the country is in the broadcast nature of the medium, which continues to offer real media value. Although outdoor political advertising media have been used in marketing political aspirants over time, the creative ingenuity and dynamism of use in recent times spur interest and its influence during electoral campaigns calls for a study.

Statement of the Problem

Adequate communication is the crux of any electoral process. It is through communication that electorates are aware of those contesting for electoral positions, under which platforms and the unique options their manifestoes offer so as to make informed voting decisions at the polls. Political advertising has been found to play considerable roles in this regard. For instance, Audu (2015) revealed that political advertising has become increasingly fascinating as politicians deploy creative copies and signages that would not only attract public attention but also appeal to their emotions, aimed at garnering their votes. Nwosu's (1992) study of the 1992 British Elections corroborates that there is a causal relationship between expenses on political advertising and victory at the polls as was reflected in the British Conservative Party's intense political advertising and its success at the polls against the Labour Party, which made little use of advertisements. Relatedly, Udeze and Akpan (2013) in their explorative study, revealed that

political advertising does influence the electorates in voting decisions but that such influence is dependent on the extent that the electorates regard the advertising messages as credible.

The preceding is a pointer to the considerable influence of political advertising in electioneering process across societies. What is, however, not empirically known is the nature of adoption and influence of outdoor political advertising media by gubernatorial aspirants in Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the influence of outdoor political advertising media by 2015 gubernatorial aspirants on electorates in Benue State.

Research Questions

1. What were the outdoor political advertising media adopted by gubernatorial aspirants during the 2015 election campaigns in Benue State?
2. What extent were electorates' exposure to outdoor political advertising media in 2015 gubernatorial election campaigns in Benue State?
3. What was the influence of outdoor political advertising by the 2015 gubernatorial aspirants on electorates in Benue State?
4. What were the challenges encountered in the use of outdoor political advertising by gubernatorial aspirants in Benue State?

Research Methodology

The population for this study constitutes the people of Benue State. According to the 2006 census as availed by the National Population Commission (2006), Benue State has a population figure of 4,253,641. A breakdown of the figure shows that the population of males in the state is 2,144,043 while the number of females is 2, 109,598. The study equally has as its population all those aspired to be elected as governor in the state. Hence the study stratified the state into the three major geo-political zones to include Zone "A", Zone "B" and Zone "C". In each of these zones, the headquarters of each zone was purposively selected to include Kastina-Ala for Zone A, Makurdi in Zone B and Otukpo local government in Zone C respectively. A sample population of 400 respondents was randomly drawn from across the zones and issued with questionnaire. Equally, three campaign coordinators of three major political parties were interviewed.

Data Presentation

A. Questionnaire

Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire research administered, 383 representing (96%) were returned while seven representing (4%), suffered mortality. The analysis is drawn up in tables and followed with explanatory analyses for each of the tables.

Table 1: Outdoor Political Ad Media exposed to by Electorates in the 2015 Benue Gubernatorial Election Campaigns

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Branded cars	67	17
Pole flags	19	5
Posters	80	21
Billboards	35	9
Handbills	21	5.48
Banners/Flexes	27	7
Inscriptions on T-Shirts and Face caps	30	8
All of the above	104	27
Total	383	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table I shows that 67 (17%) respondents are exposed to branded cars, 19 (5%) respondents' exposure was to pole flags while 80 (21%) of the respondents came in contact with posters. Also, 35 (9%) respondents were exposed to billboards, 21 (5.48%) came in contact with handbills and 27 (7%) were exposed to banners and flexes, 30 (8%) exposure of respondents was to inscriptions on T- Shirts and face caps while 104 (27%) respondents were exposed to all the outdoor political advertising media. Accordingly, 19 (5%) respondents were exposed to pole flags while 21 (5.48%) respondents were exposed to handbills during the 2015 election campaigns in Benue State.

Table 2: Frequency of Electorates to Outdoor Political Ad Media in the 2015 Gubernatorial Election Campaigns in Benue State

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	355	93
Thrice a week	17	4
Twice a week	11	3
Once a week	Nil	Nil
Once in two weeks	Nil	Nil
Total	383	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2015*

Table II shows that 355 (93%) respondents were exposed to outdoor political advertising media on daily bases, 17 (4%) respondents exposure to outdoor political advertising media was thrice in a week while 11 (3%) respondents exposure was twice in each week. Hence it can be inferred from the Table that only as few as 11 (3%) respondents were exposed to outdoor political advertising twice in every week during the 2015 gubernatorial election campaigns period.

Table 3: Influences of Outdoor Political Advertising Media during 2015 Gubernatorial Election Campaigns in Benue State

Responses	Frequenc y	Percentage (%)
Mobilized electorates to support aspirants of the party in power	39	10
Mobilized the electorates to support opposition party aspirants	137	36
Influenced electorates not to participate in the 2015 governorship elections	Nil	Nil
Facilitate high turnout and participation in 2015 election campaigns	195	51
All of the above	12	3
Total	383	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Data on Table III show that, 39 (10%) respondents were influenced by outdoor political advertising media to support the aspirants of the political party in power, 137 (36%) respondents were influenced by outdoor political advertising media to support aspirants of the opposition party, 195 (51%) of the respondents were influenced by outdoor political advertising media to participate in the 2015 governorship elections campaigns in Benue State while 12 (3%) respondents were influenced by outdoor political advertising media in all the areas identified in the Table under review. It could be inferred from Table III that outdoor political advertising influenced electorates in unique ways. Thus 39 (10%) respondents were influenced by outdoor political advertising to support the aspirants of the party in power. Respondents were influenced by outdoor political advertising media to support the aspirants of the opposition parties. The most way of outdoor political advertising influence, however, was to motivate electorates to participate in 2015 election campaigns in Benue State.

Table 4: Factor(s) that Affected Effective use of Outdoor Political Ad Media in the 2015 Governorship Election Campaigns in Benue State

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bad aesthetic quality	30	9
Poor composition of messages	25	7
They were prone to damage by bad weather and heavy rainfall	82	24
They were located at distractive traffic congested points	40	11
They carried non-factual information about candidates and their parties	75	21
All of the above	98	28
Total	350	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table VIII show that 30 (9%) respondents were aware of bad aesthetic quality as a factor that affected effective outdoor political advertising media in the 2015 election campaigns, 25 (7%) respondents were aware of poor message composition as a factor, 82 (24%) respondents stated that outdoor political advertising media was prone to damage by poor weather and heavy rainfalls while 40 (11%) respondents expressed awareness that the placement and location of outdoor political advertising at distractive traffic congested points was a hindering factor. Also, 75 (21%) respondents were aware that outdoor political advertising carried non-factual information about candidates and their political parties, while 98 (28%) of respondents noted that all the factors affected effective outdoor political advertising during the 2015 governorship election campaigns. This implies that poor message composition was the least factor that hindered effective outdoor political advertising media during the 2015 governorship election campaigns in Benue State.

B. Oral Interview

Responses from the sampled interviewees are summarily presented in the proceeding paragraphs. It is only the main and relevant responses that are reported here in order to ensure easy comprehension of the results gathered from the interview instrument.

In responding to gubernatorial aspirants' adoption of outdoor political advertising media in the 2015 gubernatorial elections campaigns in Benue State, all the interviewees affirmed that their principals utilized outdoor political advertising media. These, according to them, included: (i) Billboards (ii) Branded cars (iii) Inscription T-Shirts and caps (iv) Posters (v) Leaflets (vi) Banners/flexes (vii) Pole flags (viii) Handbills. These, they all maintained were utilized frequently.

Also, outdoor political advertising media played contributory role (s) during the 2015 gubernatorial election campaigns in Benue State. All campaign coordinators for the three political parties consented that outdoor political advertising media played contributory roles in the 2015 governorship elections campaigns. They consented that the utilization of the outdoor political advertising media by their principals helped the electorates to identify easily their aspirants with their concise manifestoes. A similar view was expressed by Hon. Richard Abu who conceded that the outdoor political advertising media used during that time served to mobilize electorates to participate in the electioneering campaigns. Other contributory roles the interviewees assented to are educating electorates on the manifestoes of their principals and parties' ideologies, being pervasive to rural residents and entertaining.

The interviewed campaign coordinators for the selected political parties of the study, namely PDP, APC and LP lamented the challenges they encountered in the course of outdoor political advertising to include the removal of their posters and billboards, high cost and difficulty in accessing the services of standard car branding companies, rising levies and taxes from BENSESA and the destruction of their billboards by heavy rains and hard sun.

Discussion of Findings

It is found in this study that outdoor political advertising media were extensively utilized by gubernatorial aspirants in the 2015 gubernatorial election campaigns in Benue State. The outdoor political advertising channels that were used during 2015 general election campaigns in Benue State were wide ranging and encompassed leaflets, banner/flexes, inscription T-Shirts/caps, branded cars, billboards and posters. These findings are based on data contained on Tables I which attested to these findings. Table I revealed that all 383 (100%) respondents were conversant with outdoor political advertising media as adopted by gubernatorial aspirants. Also, responses from the oral interview equally revealed that all the gubernatorial aspirants used outdoor political advertising media during the 2015 gubernatorial election campaigns. The data showed that campaign coordinators of the aspirants used outdoor political advertising media and quite frequently during 2015 governorship election campaigns. This finding collaborates Audu's (2014) assertion that political advertisement has become increasingly fascinating as politicians and advertising consultants unite to deploy creative copies and signages that do not only attract public attention, but also appeal to their emotions, aimed at garnering their votes.

It is also found from data on Table II that outdoor political advertising media influenced electorates in a variety of ways during 2015 gubernatorial polls. The various ways of outdoor media influence were mobilizing electorates to support the party of the government in power which have respondents of 39 (10%) attesting to, while 137 (36%) respondents noted that outdoor political advertising media influenced them to support opposition parties. However, collected data also showed that electorates perceived challenges to outdoor political advertising use to include vandalization of billboards, removal of posters, and susceptibility of outdoor media to destruction by bad weather, bad aesthetic quality, non-factual information contained on some and display of some of the outdoor media at distractive traffic points.

Similarly, data from Oral Interview indicate that all the interviewees reinstating that outdoor political advertising media were influential in informing, educating, mobilizing and entertaining electorates in 2015 gubernatorial election campaigns in Benue State. Oral Interview revealed that outdoor political advertising media were quite pervasive and reached rural residents. According to some interviewees, "on hearing party songs accompanied with music, villagers trooped out in their numbers with excitement, this, no doubt, arose their interest in the gubernatorial election campaigns", they contended. All the outdoor media campaign coordinators affirmed that the experienced challenges in the course of outdoor political advertising media use to complement the response of the electorates. The challenges they subscribed to include high levies and taxes from BENSESA; high cost of accessing standard political car branding services, activities of vandals, vulnerability of outdoor political advertising media to harsh weather and heavy rains were among other challenges they mentioned.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, therefore, the study has concluded that outdoor political advertising media were adopted and extensively utilized by the 2015 gubernatorial aspirants in Benue State. The use of a plethora of outdoor political advertising channels paved way for electorates' wide range exposure to same. The study also concluded that outdoor political advertising media played contributory roles in the 2015 governorship elections campaigns in Benue State. Outdoor political advertising played the mass media roles of informing, educating, entertaining and mobilizing electorates to participate in the 2015 governorship election campaigns in Benue State. Given these salient roles outdoor political advertising media played during the 2015 election, they were perceived to be influential and efficient. However, there were perceived challenges to outdoor political advertising used during the 2015 gubernatorial elections campaigns as found from the data. In the light of the conclusion drawn from the findings, this study recommends that:

1. Collaborative efforts should be explored by outdoor regulatory agencies, security agents and the media to intensify campaigns during elections aimed at promoting political plurality and tolerance of ideological diversity thereby discouraging the activities of vandals, area boys and supporters of opposition parties destroying outdoor political advertising media placed or mounted. Those caught violating the law should, therefore, be punished as a deterrent to others.
2. There should be situations where government in partnership with the private sector could step in by exploring how outdoor political advertising media could be adequately developed since their use has proven to be effective in mobilizing electorates to participate in elections.
3. Bodies and agencies responsible for regulating outdoor political advertising use such as OAAAN and BENSESA need to step up their efforts to ensure that outdoor political advertising strategies used do not slump to mere propaganda channels that carry non-factual information and also ensure that the placement and location of outdoor political advertising media are done in line with stipulations of the law and ethics of the bodies regulating outdoor political advertising use.
4. Research needs to be carried out around best practices in the use of outdoor political advertising media by campaign coordinators who utilize the media for their principals (aspirants). They need a level of education around what makes the use of outdoor political advertising media most effective and what does not.

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