

## **POLITICAL ADVERTISING STRATEGIES AND TACTICS: AN OVERVIEW**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines political advertising strategies and tactics. The aim is to indicate that political advertising comprises many other communications tools other than general advertising. Thus it is pinpointed that political advertising is executed through integrated marketing communication's approach, comprising general advertising, public relations, events marketing, televised political debates, and others. Accordingly these components of political advertising are reviewed. Since the objective in using these varied communications tools is for the politician to persuade the electorate to prefer him to the opponents and vote for him during elections, this paper concludes that coordination and integration of these varied communications tools are required for optimization of campaign objective.

**Keywords:** Political Advertising, Strategy, Electorate, Election

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to Davies, Chun, Silva and Roper (2003, p.4), "a strategy describes how an organization aims to meet its objectives". Worlu (2010, p.5) remarking about political strategy says it is what a political party does to achieve its objectives. It is an integrated set of actions in the pursuit of competitive advantage; In other words, political strategy is a purposive development and utilization of a party's capabilities to exploit existing and evolving opportunities in a politically competitive environment at an acceptable level of risk (Worlu, 2010). Tactics on the other hand are the shorter term, day-to-day matter (Davies, Chun, Silva & Roper, 2003). Egan (2007) says that communication strategies are the ways an organization chooses to communicate with its customers and other stakeholders; while tactics are the operational element of the communication plan. Political advertising strategy is how a political party or a politician is able to use all its capabilities and competencies to promote and distinguish itself, its programmes and manifestoes from the other competing political parties, or candidates in order to be preferred and be voted for by the electorate. Nzimiro (1992, p.10) buttressing this

point posits that “there can be no role for political advertising better than using it as a positioning technique to show how one politician or party is different from another”.

According to Aliede (2013) political advertising is an aspect of marketing politics, just like orthodox advertising is an aspect of orthodox marketing as a promotional or marketing communications tool. All organizations engage in marketing as long it can be said that they have products and customers. For as Nkamnebe (2013, p186) asserts:

*marketing is a philosophy and tool through which exchange is created, stimulated, facilitated, and sustained. It never matters if such exchange is commercial or non- commercial; if the exchange involves tangible products or intangible product; either does it matter if the item of exchange involves sociopolitical goods or economic products.*

In engaging in political advertising as an aspect of marketing politics, politicians and political parties adopt the integrated marketing communication strategies approach, that accommodate aspects of general advertising, public relations, direct response and events marketing... “all directed at achieving maximum persuasive impact for the purposes of winning votes” (Okigbo, 1992, p. 125). This is so because political advertising is different from commercial advertising for a product or service. In commercial advertising, people need only one good reason to choose one product over another. But according to Mac Dougall (1977, p.73) cited in Okigbo (1992) “when you are trying to sell a President (or any politician) one strategy just won’t do”.. This is because the voter needs to be exposed to a variety of communication tools working synergistically to maximize voter mobilization and acquisition. This in essence is marketing politics. As Okigbo (1992) observes:

*the notion of marketing politics is most apposite in a democratic society with a tradition of merit-based election. In such a setting, the aspirants need to employ communication strategies to elicit appropriate voting responses by showing how the voters would benefit from voting for them the aspirants instead of the aspirants’ competitors.*

This is the reason political advertising is more than just advertising because the contributions of the other communication tools are required for a persuasive synergistic impact on the voter. This paper now explores some of the components of political advertising in the context of integrated marketing communications, starting with general advertising.

## **General Advertising**

Advertising is defined as “a paid for, non- personal form of mass communication from an identified source, used to communicate information and influence consumer behaviour” (Egan, 2007,1993). This definition is apt for the role advertising plays in political advertising. First, through the print and electronic media including the social media, the voter is informed about the existence of a political party, or a politician, their programmes and manifestoes. Second, the voter is persuaded to vote for the party and its candidates, instead of the opponent. In crafting political advertising message whether for the print or electronic media- what is known in advertising industry practice as the creative strategy –three approaches are usually adopted: a positive approach; a comparative approach; or a negative approach (Abati, 2010). These approaches are mutually exclusive. In other words, only one approach is adopted in any given advertisement. The positive advertisement only talks about positive attributes and achievements of the sponsoring candidate without mentioning the opponent(s). In the comparative advertisement positive statements are made about the candidate sponsoring the advertisement, while the opponent is disparaged. This is with a view to establishing the superior qualities of the sponsoring candidate over the opponent. Negative advertisements, on the other hand, concentrate on attacking the opponent, making him look bad before the electorate. Negative or attack advertisements have become the norm instead of the exceptions in political campaigns. According to Worlu (2010, p.4):

*these highly emotional broadcast ads accentuate issue and policy shortcomings or attack the personal character of an opponent. They are en vogue among political consultants because, although electors say that they do not like the practice, they are more likely to recall negative rather than positive message. Moreover, controversial ads can also attract news coverage; and going negative is often thought necessary to effectively counter an opponent’s negativity.*

Negative advertising is common during elections in some democracies. For example, during the 1988 elections in the USA, Garfield ( 1988, p. 76) cited in Hill (1991, p. 715-719) reported that Dukakis used four advertisements titled “The packaging of George Bush” that show Bush’s image makers in a conference setting searching for ways “to gloss over their candidates liabilities”.. On his part, Bush used a number of different negative ads that focused on the past policies of his opponent. One advertising titled “The Dukakis Furlough Program” suggests that Dukakis pursued a liberal policy towards criminals in his state that led to increased violent

crimes such as rape and murder. Negative advertisements have become so pervasive in American politics that Jameson (1988) cited by Hill (1991) proclaimed: "Never before in a presidential campaign have television advertisement sponsored by a major party candidate lied so blatantly as in the campaign of '88".

Negative or knocking advertisements are also employed in political advertising in Britain. For example, Gabbertas (1992) observes that among the campaign messages developed for both the print media and bill board to promote the conservative party in 1979 were the following:

1. 'Education isn't working'
2. 'Every Labour government has increased unemployment'
3. 'Britain isn't getting any better'
4. 'Labour isn't working'.

In Nigeria, advertising has always played a role in political campaigns. Although Chief Obafemi Awolowo kick started the use of advertising for political campaigns with his skywriting advertising in the 1964 elections, media advertising has made great inroads in subsequent electoral campaigns. With increasing sophistication. One will easily recall SDP's radio and TV commercial for MKO during the 1993 elections with the theme "Hope 1993", and the slogan 'Nigeria on march again, MKO is our man o'. This was a positive advertisement. The same SDP used comparative advertisement as one of its ads stated "Enough is Enough". However the use of negative advertisements was the dominant approach during the 2015 presidential election. For example, the PDP employed negative advertisements to disparage the person of President Mohammed Buhari. One of PDP's newspaper advertisements published in the Punch and Daily Sun newspapers of 19 January, 2015 reads: "Nigerians be warned" (Jacob, n.d). This advertisement shows former heads of state who died in office. These include Murtala Mohammed, Sanni Abacha and President Umaru Yar'Adua. A question mark was placed over Buhari's face, probably suggesting he might be next.

This is the nature of negative advertising: to discredit and cut down political opponents, while accentuating the importance and good qualities of the sponsoring candidate.

No political campaign is complete without the pivotal role of advertising. But advertising alone is not enough without the aid of other communications tools that are engaged to support it. Among which is public relations.

## **Public Relations**

As long as people's opinions and attitudes count in a democratic electoral process, public relations, or what may be called political public relations in this instance, is of utmost importance and relevance to political campaigns According to Odigbo (2013, p. 176):

*political public relations is a specialized area of public relations concerned with the result oriented management of images, reputation, attitudes, opinions and behavioral problems, issues and crises that impinges upon the enthronement, existence, preservation, sustenance, development or growth of government, constituted political principles, democratic orders and the rule of law. It is mainly concerned with the promotion of general understanding, cooperation and healthy relationships between a government, political party or a politician and their diverse publics. It therefore wins the goodwill, acceptance and support of the diverse publics for their views, opinions, policies, programmes and projects, tempers, acrimonies, and keeps unhealthy oppositions at bay.*

In orthodox or traditional public relations, the most significant contribution of public relations to marketing effort is the careful securing of third party credibility through news and editorial coverage of a product or service for a promotional outcome. The credible third parties that may enhance a candidate's public standing in politics through internal and external communications according to Caywood (1992) include:

*daily and weekly newspapers through editorials, columns, stories and even cartoons; broadcast programmes, political parties, independent political and issue interest groups, churches, schools, communities, fraternal organizations, labour and professional groups, and even families and friends.*

To underscore the importance of political public relations in Nigeria, Samaila (2013) observes that:

*public relations strategies of Luncheons and Dinners were effectively used by political parties and political aspirants. Parties organized such luncheons or dinners at different zones into which Nigeria has been divided to raise money for*

*political campaigns. Tickets were sold for those attending, and notable rich party loyalists and other individuals were invited to such occasions for the purpose of getting huge sums of money of donations from them...Other public relations strategy freely used were press conferences – where party stalwarts addressed gatherings of media people, party loyalists, and electorates; and the use of press release to report their political activities with a view of winning more political converts and spread the salient points of their manifestoes.*

According to Caywood (1992), public relations may be more useful than advertising to convey a message in political campaigns when:

1. The candidate is more news worthy
2. The campaign has a low budget
3. There is a pervasive negative environment
4. The known candidate takes an unexpected stand on an issue
5. There are complex personal and policy issues
6. PR can help a candidate build a stronger political organization.
7. Run a 24 hour campaign
8. Optimize communications in a very short time frame.
9. Gain marginal votes with marginal communications tactics of all forms
10. Offset a negative advertising campaign with alternative communications tactics.

In addition to public relations other communication tactics like televised political debates, celebrity endorsement, and others are used.

### **Televised Debates**

Televised political debates are parts and parcel of American political campaigns. These debates are organized to enable U.S. Presidential candidates discuss contemporary issues before the U.S. electorate so as to enable them assess the programmes of each candidate and weigh the options before them. The latest televised political debate in America was between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in 2016 U.S. Presidential election. Tv political debate was introduced as part of political advertising in Nigeria in 1993 during General Babaginda's political transition programme. The Presidential candidates of the two government recognized parties, MKO Abiola

of Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Alhaji Tofa of National Republican Convention (NRC) and their Vices faced each other in a televised debate to the delight of the electorate who used the opportunity to decide which candidate to support and vote for.

### **Celebrity Endorsement**

This is the use of the credibility associated with a celebrity to carry a message. (Egan, 2007, p.206) Commercial marketing uses celebrities who are paid to endorse products in an effort to transfer the celebrities' qualities to the products they endorse or create a believable linkage between the products and the celebrities. Therefore, the celebrities should be appropriate for the products and the target audiences. Celebrity endorsement is now transferred to political campaigns where politicians socialize with entertainment stars including musicians and footballers to choreograph photo ops in order to raise each other's profile. For example the political TV advertisement for Ambode during his 2015 Lagos State gubernatorial campaign, featured different Nigerian musicians who sang the theme song 'I believe' with Ambode (Ojekwe, 2015). The same celebrity endorsement was noticeable in the 2011 TV commercial for President Goodluck Jonathan, in which musicians from different parts of Nigerian endorsed him.

In Britain and America, politicians socialize with musicians, footballers, and other entertainment stars. Worlu (2010) opines that the most famous endorsers are national or provincial politicians such as party leaders and cabinet ministers. According to him:

*These political celebrities leverage their media status in an attempt to raise the profile of the party's local candidate, to build morale among volunteers and to generate local campaign momentum. They tend to visit districts where there is an opportunity to win the seat, and participate in activities such as lending their voice to local radio ads, being available to media interviews participating in walkabouts with the candidate and timing a news conference in the riding.*

### **Direct Response**

In political advertising, direct-mail is the dominant direct response variant. Egan (2007,p.297) defines direct mail as a flexible communications medium with almost limitless creative potential. It can be effective as both a customer acquisition and/or customer retention tool. In political campaign, direct mail is thought to be used by constituency campaigns generally only for fund raising, the firming of candidate partisans and post-campaign thank-you-letters (Worlu,2010). Worlu stresses that these under-the-radar activities involve lobbying elected officials, soliciting of contributions from wealthy

donors and phoning supporters without alerting opponents. Direct mail messages must be credible and civil so as to retain voter's confidence. Direct mail stealth campaign characterized the 1980 American presidential election, and information mailed directly to American electors in a campaign's final days continued to be used. Also direct mail campaigns exist in Canada but without the severe messages that have become notorious in the United States (Worlu,2010).

### **Events Marketing**

According to Marketing-Schools.org (2012) event marketing is a promotional strategy that involves face-to-face contact between companies and their customers at special events like concerts, fairs, and sporting events. Brands use event marketing- entertainment (like shows, contests, or parties) to reach consumers through direct hand-to-hand sampling or interactive displays. The practice works because it engages consumers while they are in a willing participatory position.

During political campaigns, special events like constituency tour, party rallies, luncheons, press parties enable politicians and political parties to engage with the electorate. These forums enable politicians and party representatives to identify with the electorate, be personally known to them, pass information first hand to the electorate, and answer questions from the voters on issues of importance to them.

Okigbo (1992, p.124) says political advertising is a war for the minds of the electorate. "The battle is fought not only in the obvious fields of paid advertisements, but also in all the compounds and alleys for peddling influence especially when the audience is unsuspecting". He points out how the political consultants to Jimmy Carter during Carter's political campaign outsmarted the opponent. Okigbo remarks that Malcolm Macdonald, the campaign manager for Jerry Ford, one of Jimmy Carter's opponents, had this to say:

*Jimmy Carter was in every talk show, every panel show, every game show, every quiz show. It hadn't cost a nickel to bring the real Jimmy Carter into every living room in America. He was part of the furniture before Ronald Reagan or Jerry Ford entered the fight. And the networks still didn't know that they were being had.*

Political events marketing are not new phenomena. As far back as 1945 when John F. Kennedy was running for congress, Barnes (2005) reports that he accepted as many invitations to as many events as he could cram into his schedule. To enable him meet voters personally, he had neighbourhood house parties, where a volunteer would open his house to neighbours and free

food and drink would be served, and he would drop by to chat and shake hands. There were tea parties at the Kennedy's also, whereby Kennedy's mother and sisters hosted semi-formal teas for female voters. All these personal contacts aided his electoral victories.

In Nigeria, the use of events for political purposes is not uncommon. According to Ukase (2015), the PDP organized a fund raising dinner for its presidential candidate, President Goodluck Jonathan, for the 2015 political campaign at which it raised more than N22 billion. Similar events had been organized by political parties and their candidates for political campaigns in Nigeria's previous elections.

### **Phone Banks**

Political parties hire private calling centres or ask their party centre to coordinate phone calls in-house. Worlu (2010) argues that these phone banks involve paid callers operating on a quota system and have time/cost advantages such as predictive dialing that filters out unusable telephone numbers. A fee per completed call is negotiated, potential respondents are targeted, and collected information may be provided in an electronic data base that is compatible with a campaign's canvassing software programme.

At a time, political telemarketing was gaining popularity in Canada, in part because of the high proportion of telephone canvass volunteers showing up. In Nigeria, political parties and their candidates use the services of GSM operators like MTN, GLO, ETISALAT, ZAIN and others to send political messages to the electorate through SMS medium.

### **Robo-Calls**

According to Worlu (2010) many American campaigns are delivering pre-recorded messages from candidates, celebrities, or campaign workers to electors using automated phone calls. A single telephone computerized auto-dialer can contact up to eighty electors per hour. These robot calls provide advance notice of a direct mailing, remind supporters about early voting options, encourage electors to turn out to vote, and generally target messages to specific groups. In some extreme cases, negative messages respond to an opponent's broadcast advertising attack.

### **Video Imaging**

Candidates' images can be manipulated using graphic design software, to make the candidate appear different than he is. Computer generated images can be electronically inserted into television broadcasts and pictures. However, interest in video-imaged advertising being perceived as a lie would mean the sponsor is untrustworthy. Using desktop publishing

software however to clean up photographs such as removing unwanted background image from brochure photograph, is common at both national and local level.

Video imaging is not commonly used in Nigeria's political campaigns.

### **Push Polls**

This is the use of unscientific questionnaires to thrust electors towards a response and to intentionally collect faulty data. Exaggerated candidate's support is then communicated to the public to aid in fundraising efforts. The worst kind of push polls are suppression polls, which slander a candidate with the specific objective of discouraging turnout (Worlu, 2010). Alternately, electors are provided with false information about a candidate in order to see how it impacts upon respondent views.

PDP used Push Polls in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, when it was speculated that President Jonathan would win the election.

### **Oppo**

This is opposition research to gain intelligence for comparative advertising and to publicly embarrass opponents. Worlu (2010) says "scrutinizing opponent's qualifications commonly known as Oppo – can involve campaign personnel engaging in somewhat unscrupulous searches of news media archives, legislative voting records, public position statements, personal lives, military service records, and campaign finance records".

An example of Oppo in Nigeria was during the 2015 Presidential election campaign when it was alleged that President Mohammed Buhari did not have a Secondary School Certificate.

### **Social Media**

The internet's economical integration of interactive visual, sound, and data renders it useful as a potent political advertising tool. Since it can be used in diverse ways, it allows individuals to voice their opinions and concerns, and it provides excellent platforms for exchange of opinions. The internet, particularly the social media is blurring traditionally boundaries of relationship between different power centres. Ibraheem (2014) reminds us of how the social media worked to enable Barack Obama Clinch the U.S. Presidency in 2008.

According to Ibraheem Obama's case is frequently referred to as the way social media were used to swing an election in favour of Barack Obama. "Obama's wildly successful campaign in the U.S. used Facebook and Twitter, as well as apps for the

Iphone, to get people voting''. Ibraheem (2014) also reports that social media played significant role in the 2010 parliamentary elections in the united kingdom. The internet was said to have played an important role in the election as research found that almost half of the population went on line for information about parties and their candidates.

In Nigeria in the 2011 elections, President GoodLuck Jonathan recognized the importance of social media, and accordingly declared his presidential ambition for that year's election on Facebook. Also in the 2015 general elections both PDP and APC used the Social Media to promote their party and candidates.

### **Communications Strategy**

In order to coordinate the various political advertising tools to generate a synergistic result, these is need for a planned approach to the communications strategy. This is necessary to ensure

1. Effective use of limited financial resources.
2. Effective deployment of appropriate tool to designated voter segment.
3. Coordination of efforts to avoid duplication and wastefulness.
4. Cooperation among the different agencies.

The planned approach to communication strategy starts with

### **Situation Analysis**

This is a fact –finding exercise to ascertain or assess the circumstances of a political party or a politician. How is the political party or politician regarded by the electorate. Is the party or politician liked or disliked by the electorate. Does the party or the politician command the attention of the electorate? Is the party or politician seen as capable of delivering on its electoral promises? Does the party or politician have a national or regional outlook. Does the electorate identify with the party's or politician's programmes, Which segment of the electorate will be convinced to accept the party or politician as capable of providing good governance to the citizenry.

All these and others will help define the voters to be addressed, the communication objectives to set, the message(s) to communicate and the appropriate media channel to select.

### **Definition of target group of voters**

Which of the voter groups need be communicated with during the campaign?

All the voters? Floating voters? Loyal voters? etc. Will the campaign be national or regional? The result of the situation analysis will help determine these.

### **Determination of Communication Objectives**

From the findings during the situation analysis a number of objectives to be achieved by the communications would be decided. For example, some objectives could be (a) To portray a politician as empathetic and humane (b) To strengthen the leadership dimensions of a Presidential candidate. (c) To cut the opponent to size.

### **Definition of the type and extent of information which target voters need. And determination of the nature of appeal to be made**

For example are positive or negative advertisements to be created? Will celebrities be used to endorse the candidate? These are decisions to be made.

### **Decision about which communication task(s) is to be performed by which communication resources or tool**

For example TV and billboard advertising might be chosen to create awareness about a party and its candidates; while event marketing can be used to persuade voters and secure their assurances to vote for the party's candidates.

### **Estimation of overall budget and agreement about distribution over components of promotional mix**

The task-based method would be most appropriate in determining budget for political advertising. This is because it is only after agreement is reached about the number and sizes of advertisements and their positions that media cost can be determined and production cost estimated. Cost for PR activities would be similarly determined.

### **Monitoring of campaign progress and generation of feedback for remedial action**

Opinion poll can be conducted; and counter attack ads made and broadcast

## CONCLUSION

Political advertising strategies and tactics have developed in response to technological development. Before the electronic media of radio and TV penetrated the households, the print media supported by rallies and other outdoor gathering like film shows and public address system were the channels of political advertising. Accordingly, print media advertising and event marketing were the main political advertising strategies and tactics deployed.

The home penetration of the electronic media made for the addition of the broadcast media for political advertising. This widened the media option available for political advertising and made it possible for public relations strategies and tactics to be employed, and TV debates adopted for political campaigns. Sophistication of the outdoor media made for ever-widening media mix of political advertising.

The internet and mobile phones added a new dimension to political advertising, making one-on-one conversation with electorate possible. Thus the electorate could be reached through many and varied channels of communication. What is required is clarification of objective(s) for each communication tool so as to avoid duplication of effort; efficient use of campaign resources, coordination and integration of campaign activities for synergistic optimization of campaign result.

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