Political Advertising and Electioneering in Nigeria: An Analysis of 2015 General Election Newspaper Advertisements

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Abstract

This is content analysis of political advertising during Nigeria's 2015 general election with a view to ascertaining the following: The extent to which the ads fanned religious sentiments, the scale with which the ads resorted to personal attacks, the level to which the ads employed ethnic/tribal/regional/tendencies, the degree to which the ads adopted hate messages, the magnitude to which the ads embraced issue-based approaches to the campaign and finally, the scope to which the ad copies complied to the APCON code on political advertising. The ad copy constituted the unit of analysis while the period of study covered January to March, 2015. Two newspapers namely: *The Guardian* and *The Punch* were studied giving off a total of 240 issues. A census sampling procedure was undertaken while the major parameter for coding was the frequency of occurrence of the identified categorisation scheme. The results of the study showed that 63% of the ads dealt with non-issues. Regarding issue-based ads, socio-cultural issues constituted the majority. Of the non-issues analysed in the study, neutral (celebratory) messages were as high as 44.42% while personal attack ads amounted to 41.04%. However, religious, ethnic and sectional sentiments and violent/hate messages occurred at 6.23%, 3.89% and 1.82% respectively. The conclusion of the study is that political advertising in the two Nigerian newspapers was largely non-issue based and still some marks off compliance with APCON code on political advertising. These findings have serious implications for journalism and political advertising practice in Nigeria necessitating the recommendations made herein.

1.   Introduction

Political advertising is as old as partisan politics. Political office seekers often seek the ubiquitous, cumulative, consonance-oriented advantages of the communications media to place their messages before the public in order to escalate their political value and chances of being accepted, adopted, endorsed, and possibly voted into power.

The recurring decimal is the adroit deployment of information, facts, figures, images, and imagery often in hyperbolic and propagandistic proportions to persuade the electorate and other political, corporate, religious, and cultural elite. This practice is not strange to Nigeria's political sphere. However, over the years, the use of advertising in politics has become tense, acrimonious, and *problematique*. This spawned the enunciation of policies and regulations to order the political advertising terrain. This study examines political ads in Nigeria as they relate to electioneering, particularly in the last (2015) general election with a view to determining their proclivity for promoting pertinent national/regional, social, economic, and cultural issues or their tendency towards personal attacks, ethnic slurs, hate messages; and the status of their compliance with political advertising codes.

1.1   Statement of the Problem

There is no disputing the fact that the media play a key role or central role in politics. This role may be in the form of surveillance, interpretation, socialisation, linkage of the components of society, etc. This pivotal role has come to be referred to as mediatisation. In an article entitled, "A culturalist approach to the concept of mediatisation of politics: the age of "media hegemony", Block (2013) sees mediatisation of politics as, "a helpful conceptual tool for examining the ways in which political and media actors and ordinary citizens deal with political matters via the various forms of media at their disposal" (p. 261). Block points out that five key features characterised the political communication in Venezuela in the era of Hugo Chavez. These are that the media played a major role in everyday politics, that the nation is a, "media culture" whose "primary resources" of meaning are provided by the media (p.273) that there is a mediatised character of opposition, that the media could be used to polarize and that citizens increasingly aspire to acquire a voice in the society by means of the media.

Advertising is one of the major ways in which politics is played out in the media. Holtz –Bacha *et al*. (2012) sees political advertising as, "the specific way a political system presents itself to the public. They note the three models of media and politics to include (a) the polarised pluralist model of the Mediterranean states, characterised by weak broadcast system and political actors that exert strong influence on the media, (b) the democratic corporatist model of northern and central European states marked of a long tradition of public broadcasting and strong institutions of media regulation and high level of media independence and, (c) the liberal model prevalent in the UK, USA, Canada and Ireland and underscored by more liberal and market-oriented ideas which dominate the media system. Holtz-Bacha *et. al.* (2012) conclude that, "the differences in the political and

social structures… be also reflected in political advertising" (p. 79). In a similar vein, Hsu and Barker (2013) who studied individualism and collectivism in Chinese and American television advertising emphasise that, "advertisers develop messages that appeal to what audience want and perceive to be desirable and acceptable, thereby reinforcing existing value system rather than promoting conflicting values" (p.700).

This background has provided the basis for understanding the role of the media in politics, the role of advertising in politics and thus helps us to appreciate the peculiar problem of political advertising in Nigeria. Nigeria is a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual nation of diverse people, economies, capacities and inconsistencies. It is resource-rich, but poverty is pervasive. Its people are culturally and religiously different but are tied into one political entity. These differences come to the fore at moments of political competition for executive and legislative power positions. Since our politics is to some extent mediatised, to what extent is political advertising in Nigeria an integrative force or sectarian and divisive.

1.2   Objectives of the Study
The major purpose of this study was to interrogate the application of political advertising to Nigeria's electioneering process in the context of the 2015 general election. The specific objectives of the study were to:
(a)   Examine the magnitude to which the select Nigerian newspaper political ads in (*The Guardian* and *The Punch*) reflected issue-based subjects in the 2015 general election campaign.
(b)   Ascertain the extent to which the ads contained religions sentiments
(c)   Determine the scale to which the ads adopted personal attacks, smear and slurs strategy
(d)   Evaluate the level to which the ads employed ethnic/tribal/sectional tendencies
(e)   Find out the degree to which the ads embraced hate messages in the 2015 election campaign
(f)   Investigate the scope to which the ads complied with relevant aspects of APCON code on political advertising.

1.3   Research Questions
(i)   To what extent are the 2015 political advertisement in select Nigerian newspapers reflective of issue-based topics?
(ii)   What is the magnitude of religious sentiment content in the 2015 political ads in select Nigerian newspapers?
(iii)   To what scale do the 2015 political ads in the select Nigerian newspapers adopt personal attacks, smears and slur strategy?
(iv)   At what level do the 2015 political ads in the select Nigerian newspapers employ ethnic/tribal/sectional/ divisive tendencies.
(v)   To what degree do the 2015 political ads in the select Nigerian newspapers embrace hate messages?
(vi)   What is the scope of compliance with relevant APCON code on political advertising by the select Nigerian newspapers?

2.   Review of Literature
This review takes a look at the concepts of a democracy, the status of democratic rule in Nigeria, the concept of political advertising, the code that regulates political advertising in Nigeria and lastly, the character of political ad campaigns and the ways in which they infringe on advertising regulation.

Democracy: Mattes and Bratton (2007) define democracy as, "a system of rules and procedures by which leaders, groups, and parties compete for power, and in which free and equal people elect representatives to make binding decisions" (p. 192).

Nigeria has a disturbing history of democratic rule. After independence in 1960, the first democratically elected government was short-lived as it was interrupted by military coup makers as well as a bitter civil war that ensued for three years. Despotic military rule subsisted for the next 13 years but even a restored democracy in 1979 did not last beyond a tenure and the next military interregnum lasted for 16 years with damaging toll exerted on the executive, judicial, legislative and bureaucratic aspects of government. The social, cultural, economic and political realms of the Nigerian society suffered a serious setback with inefficiency, corruption, profligacy, weak institutions, and infrastructure deficits becoming the ineluctable repercussions. It is therefore safe to say that though a some semblance of interrupted democracy has been witnessed in Nigeria for the past 16 years (1999-2015), democracy cannot be described as consolidated. A consolidated democracy is one in which these arrangements develop into permanent, consistent, and autonomous institutions governed by justifiable rules." By institutionalisation, the authors mean that democratic structures are deployed in effective and impartial fulfillment of legislative, executive, prosecutory and public utility functions.

Political Advertising: Political advertising is a key feature of democracies. Political parties, candidates, interest

groups, etc employ it to sell themselves and their programmes. Generally speaking, Hsu and Barker (2013) taking the perspective of its global proliferation, see advertising as an inseparable part of consumer business which plays an important communicative role in society. Citing Richards and Curran (2002) Hsu and Barker define advertising as, "a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future (p. 696). They explain that advertisers craft messages in order to meet acceptable and desirable wants perceived by the audiences and by so doing reinforce subsisting value system as against the promotion of conflict.

This view of advertising finds echo in Holtz-Bacha *et. al.* (2011) where they observe that, advertising should resonate with the audience if it is to effective in addition to being meaningful to the people, loading up their norms and values, and address their affect. To them, advertising mirrors respective cultures, and we add democratic/political cultures, reflects the normative construct of society and in time, cultural change. To this end, political advertising mirrors political culture with ad copies addressing themselves to an analysis of the individual aspects of a political culture.

Given the global and pervasive nature of advertising and the widespread use of advertising in political campaigns, research scholars have investigated the phenomenon especially as it regards effects of advertising during election campaigns, the forms and variations of negative political advertising, the impact of negative political advertising, or the use of advertising for election campaigns across countries. We shall look at these studies in depth.

Almost two decades ago, Procter and Schenck-Hamlin (1996) studied the forms and variations in negative political advertising. They used a sample of 99 political ads from 1990 statewide and federal elections and conducted a content analysis to test whether negative political ads featured a normative style. This study highlighted the following key conclusions: Firstly, that, "the presence of an average negative advertising model suggests that norms for negative advertising are established within the context of the campaign communication event itself… Candidates and consultants, within the campaign context, determine strategies which maximise their chance to win while minimising their opponent's chance to win and rely on that formula in the construction of campaign advertisements" (p. 154).
Secondly, that political campaigning increasingly filled with formula-like negative ads reduce complex political problems to formulaic prescriptions with the tendency to minify the quality of political debate.

Thirdly, the narrow nature of normative negative ad targeting in the main, a candidate's ethical behaviours apart from being most objectionable does not allow an evaluation and decision down to personal on varying political ideas and policies; reduces political choices morality thus sparking off feelings of alienation from the political system, and decreasing trust and faith in political personages.

In a another study dealing with television ads during the 2009 European election campaign involving France, Germany, Sweden and the Uk, Holtz-Bacha *et. al.* (2012) focused on formal features, production techniques, content, personalisation, style/argumentation as well as visualisation. It also dealt with structural data of the TV spots, the most popular presentational formats, most important topics, and national or European angle.

Regarding the thematic structure of the spots, the study found out that, "the dominant main issue in the spots of all four countries was the economy and financial policy, most notably in the German ads, where 47% of all sequences focused on economic matters. In the French spots, the economy was the most important policy issue as well with 29% of the sequence treating such topics. The case is similar for the UK spots, where 22%... dealt with economic issues. The Swedish spots featured the economy to a comparable amount (20%) yet focus here was on other, political problems, most importantly agriculture (30%) and social policy (20%). At the same time, social policy figured as the second most important issue in the spots of all four countries" (p. 87).

In relation to the analysis of the perspective from which these topics were dealt with, the findings showed that in a comparison of the four countries, Germany and Sweden indicated two polarities, with Germany ads featuring the most national orientation (52%) while Sweden portrayed the strongest European perspective (67%). The study also showed that, "the ads in all countries relied on personalisation" to a considerable extent… indicated by the appearance of politicians in the visuals (p.89), a characterisation of advertising in party-oriented political systems.

The study concluded that the findings confirm the potent, "relationship between the style and contents of political advertising and the specific culture of a country" (p.90). Further studies, this time taking the experimental route to measure the cognitive and effective effects of political advertising during an election campaign, Daignault, Soroka and Giasson (2013) cashing in on the growing scientific interest in political ads investigated the immediate and simultaneous effects of positive, negative and mixed-content electoral ads. The study drew its data from a series of pretests of an experiment involving 31 voters in the 2011 Canadian Federal election. Measurements were based on ads' argumentative content and non verbal cues whose impacts were tested with the use of innovative multimethod involving physiological and cognitive parameters.
The Daignault's *et al.'s* study reached three major conclusions as follows:
(a)   Negative televised election ads generate raised attention levels and a greater degree of physiological

activation in persons when compared with positive or mixed messages.

(b)   Participants show beef up in cognitive elaboration while watching ads of their own political affiliations.

(c)   Participants express more persuasive resistance to negative ad campaigns than to positive and mixed ads.

The authors surmise that these findings are strongly supportive of the several studies of political advertising hinging on the cognitive-response approach showing that negative ads produce the greatest counter arguments.

Also, de Run, Weng, and Ming (2013) studied the impact of negative political advertising in Malaysia. The study measured attitude towards the advertisements, advertisement likeability advertisement believability, positive emotional quotient towards the advertisement and its effect on actual behaviour. It examined data obtained from 150 respondents using descriptive, correlation and regression analyses among others. Nothing that, "negative campaign in Malaysia has been the mainstay of Malaysian politics for a long time", (p.55), the study found out that the likeability of an ad is a measurement of positive emotional quotient but that the advertisement in the end did not achieve any changes in behaviour from non-affiliated voters and that only advertisement believability had a positive correlation with actual behaviour because it was crucial in transforming voters into action through limited to predisposed beliefs and amount of available information. The authors cautioned against recourse to negative political advertising as it raises more cynicism among voters. Rather, to them, advertisements that disseminate vital information such as on development issues relevant to people should be created. Political advertising in Nigerian clearly appears to bear all of the issues raised in this review: issue-based topics, negativism, personal attacks, etc. The extent of these characteristics is what this study is to determine. Perhaps, it is because of the prevalence of unwholesome political advertising also noticeable in Nigeria that prompted the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (established by Decree No 55 of 1988) to articulate rules on political advertising in its code. The guidelines are as follows:

Article 71:

Political advertisements shall be issue-oriented and devoid of abusive statements and references. They shall not employ false, distorted and unsubstantiated claims or contain misrepresentations.

Article 72:

Every   political   advertisement   shall   clearly   identify   the   sponsoring organisation/individual. Visually/orally Political advertisements shall not explicitly or implicitly exploit ethnicity, religion, or any other sectional interests (APCON, 2005).

APCON also requires that media houses, agencies, political parties politicians, and their agents ensure that their political ads be in consonance with the provision of the APCON code.

Obot and Batta (2012) in their article, entitled, Scoping out the Adspace: Presidential Primary Election Advertising Campaign and regulation in Nigeria, the focus of investigation was the 2011 general election. In that study a content analysis of 96 issues of *The Guardian, The Nation* and *The Punch* for the period of December 13, 2010 to January 13, 2011 was conducted. A summary of the findings of the study was as follows:

(i)   103 political ads analysed from the three dailies showed 65% non issue-based copies while 28.2% dealt with economic issues.

(ii)   There was a general glossing over of issues concerning the compliance of political advertising to APCON code. The study points to a single advertorial by the Broadcast Commission restating its provisions on political broadcast materials based on the principles of pluralism and equitable airtime.

It is true that advertising plays a significant role in society. Bardi (2010) has outlined those roles but we may extend those roles as they affect political advertising by stating that political advertising contributes to the political growth of a country, it helps political stakeholders especially the electorate to make political choices about political programmes, manifestoes, parties, candidates, policies and interests; it boosts the development of the media industry through advertising revenues that accrue to ad agencies and ad media; and generally enhances democratic, social, economic, and cultural values in a country. Therefore, to what extent is political advertising in today's Nigeria reflective of this ideal? To what extent is political advertising reflective of the provisions of APCON code? Has anything changed between 2011 and 2015? This study is designed to provide answers to some of these questions.

3. Theoretical Framework

To the extent that political advertising and news coverage of political events all constitute focus of political communication, this study is premised on three relevant theories as follows:

(a) Functional Theory of Campaign Discourse: Roberts (2013) in his article entitled, "A functional analysis comparison of web-only advertisements and traditional television advertisements from the 2004 and 2008

presidential campaigns;" explains that the functional theory of campaign discourse renders a helpful scheme to classify and synthesise political advertising. He adds that the assumption of the theory is that because elections are intrinsically competitive, political actors deploy campaign messages which include advertising to present a more preferable image of them. They use political ads to:

(1) Acclaim themselves with positive statements about their credentials as the better candidate, (2) attack an opponent's credentials, or (3) defend with reputations against an opponents' attach. Candidates use those three functions for themes of (i) policy or (2) character. Policy themes can discuss actions or ideas related to governmental action related to past deeds, plans and general goals. Character themes can discuss the candidate's perceived qualities related to personal qualities, leadership abilities and values or principles (p. 28).

It would be interesting to see the extent of the use of self-acclaim, attacks, ethnic slurs, smear campaign, religious divisiveness, or issue-based topics relating to economic, social, cultural, political policies in the 2015 political/electioneering advertising.

(b) Agenda Setting Theory: There is no gainsaying the fact that there are various ways in which media agenda can be set. This can be done through focused news coverage, targeted editorial commentary, syndicated opinions and columns, cumulated messages, and consensus/consonance among journalists, widespread and penetrative advertising. Ragas and Tran (2013) remind us that, "agenda settings; central proposition remains unchanged: the elements prominent in the media's picture of the world will over time become prominent in the public's picture" (p.47a). They state further that:

Agenda-setting scholars have identified two major types of elements: *Object* (such as issues politicians, brands) and *attributes* (i.e., the qualities and characteristics that help fill out the pictures of these objects. Through repeated emphasis on these elements… the media shape the salience of objects…; as well as the attributes the public associates with the objects.

The implication of this theory to our study is that by monitoring the character of political advertising in Nigeria as captured in the Nigerian newspapers, it may become possible to determine the attributes of the campaign that are most dominant in the media and consequently extrapolate that the same attributes resonated or gained salience among members of the newspaper reading public.

(c) Mediatisation of Politics: According to Couldry and Hepp (2013), mediatisation, a recent topic for communication theory, "captures somehow the broad consequences for everyday life and practical organisation (social, political, cultural, economic) of media and more particularly of the pervasive spread of media contents and platforms through all types of context and practice" (p. 191).

Extending the discourse of the mediatisation of politics in the age of media hegemony, Block (2013) speaks of a process that describes the media-propelled nature of present day politics, of an omnipresent media that appear to pervade all aspects of political life and of the manner in which media production procedures, frames, and values of news selection have almost become imbibed by politicians and bodies that they seem part of governance.

Block argues that modern media are hegemonic but that they are not the only factors in the investigation of the mediatisation of politics since they are a part of the complex web of symbolic interactions that make up the network of political communication and of society. To this end, Block (2013) citing Stromback (2008) explains that mediatisation of politics involves four closely inter-correlated dimensions:

(a)   The degree to which the media constitute the most important or dominant source of information.
(b)   The degree to which the media are independent from political institutions in terms of how media are governed
(c)   The degree to which media content is governed by a political logic or by media logic.
(d)   The degree to which political actors are governed by a political logic or media logic.

When these aspects are considered in whole, they approximate the extent, Block states, to which politics is mediatised. This theory allows us, in the Nigerian context to determine the level to which the electorate depend on the media for political information as well as the pervasive influence of the media on politics and vice versa.

4. Research Method

This study adopted the content analysis research design to allow for the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 2015 electioneering ad campaigns in Nigeria. The scope of study involved a collation and synthesis of all political advertisements related to the 2015 general election in Nigeria which lasted from January 1 to March 31, 2015.

The Guardian and *The Punch* respectively were purposively selected for study. *The Guardian* panders to elitism while *The Punch* leans toward populism. Both papers are published in the nation's economic capital, Lagos and are read nationwide.

The population of the study consisted of 240 issues of the two newspapers at 120 issues each covering the period of three months. Because of the manageable size of the population, a census sampling technique was

adopted. The unit of analysis was the image/text of the political advertisement while the content categories were as follows:

(a) **Issue-based content** embraced all advertisements related to social, economic, political, cultural subjects matters affecting Nigeria to which the political advertisers sought genuine solutions to. Examples are poverty, infrastructure deficit, unemployment, performance achievement, education, employment, corruption, efficiency, economy, electoral reform, judicial reform, etc.

(b) **Religious sentiments** capture all copies that fan the embers of religious differences in Nigeria particularly those playing Christianity against Islam, their leaders or adherents.

(c) **Ethnic/tribal/sectional tendencies** concern all copies that play one ethnic /tribal/regional group against the other or the north versus south or divisive interests as opposed to unifying, integrative, national interests

(d) **Personal attacks** deal with all ad messages that lapse into vituperations, insults, and mudslinging directed at the persons and characters of political opponents as exposed to focus on policies, strategies, programmes, manifestoes and issues.

(e) **Hate messages** pertain to all ad messages that stir-up vile, hatred and venom against political opponents, their parties, faith, and place of origin.

(f) **Code-Compliant Copies** classify all ad copies on the basis of adherence or non-adherence to APCON advertising code on political advertising.

5. Results and Discussion of Findings
This section highlights the results of this study and discusses the findings based on the objectives of the study.
a) Content categories of political ads in two newspapers
Table 1: Content of Political Ads

Content	Newspapers					
	The Punch		*The Guardian*		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Issue-based Political Ads	114	37.87	111	35.92	225	36.89
Non-issue-based Political Ads	187	62.13	198	64.08	385	63.11
Total	**301**	**100**	**309**	**100**	**610**	**100**

Table 1 shows that the sample yielded a total of 610 political advertisements related to the 2015 general elections and of that number, a significant majority of 63.11% were not based on issues. Both *The Punch* and *The Guardian* bore political ads that were not issue-based. There was no significant difference too in the total number of advertisements borne by the two newspapers. *The Guardian* ads outnumbered *The Punch* ads by only nine.

(b) The extent to which the 2015 election political advertisement reflected issue based campaign.
Table 2: Issue-Based Ads

Content	Newspapers					
	The Punch		*The Guardian*		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
• Economy/development Issues	51	44.74	37	33.33	88	39.11
• Political Issues	5	4.39	9	8.11	14	6.22
• Social Cultural Issues	58	50.87	65	58.56	123	54.67
Total	**114**	**100**	**111**	**100**	**225**	**100**

Table 2 shows that the political advertisement for the 2015 general election dealt more on socio-cultural issues such as health, education, corruption, women, youths, public utilities, etc. to the tune of 54.67%. Political issues dealing with federalism, structure of the Nigerian state, political reforms, governance, the arms of government, the bureaucracy, etc. trailed at a mere 6.22%. Economic and development issues pertaining to indsutralisation, agriculture, the extractive industry, fiscal and monetary policy occurred at 39.11%. The data show that political advertisers, when they chose to deal with issues were more concerned with social/cultural issues much more than with political and economic issues. In order words, the 2015 election in the estimation of the political actors was more of a welfarist campaign.

Again, there appeared to be no significant difference between the two analysed newspapers in terms of the character of issues given attention in the advertisements. An example of economic issue-based ad ran thus: "The Abuja-Kaduna railway line: changing the face of the Nigerian economy". This was sponsored by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in *The Punch,* June 22, 2015. Another one by the same party on a socio-cultural issue read: Maternal mortality in Nigeria under Jonathan reduced by 30%" – *Sunday Guardian,* March 22, 2015; p. 4. Other examples read thus: "Education is key in building a modern society," Generate, transmit, distribute electricity on 24/7 basis while simultaneously ensuring the development of sustainable renewable

energy" and, 11 Nigerian economy is moving forward. We have secured investment commitments worth 4.89 trillion. Five million passengers now use the coastal railway across – 10 states. Non oil exports have risen to N5.67 billion. Local rice production has gone up to 9 million tons. Local content production has gone up 35.9 million metric tons. Twenty three automobile manufacturing firms have committed to local automobile assembly in Nigeria" – *The Punch,* January 26, 2015. All said, a greater majority of political ads during Nigerian 2015 general election placed more emphasis on social/cultural issues and less emphasis on economic and political issues.

 (c) The scale to which political advertisements for the 2015 general election depicted religious sentiments, ethnic, tribal, sectional tendencies, violence-inciting messages, personal attacks, hate messages, and other non-issues.

Table 3: Non-Issue Based Political Ads

Non-Issues	Newspapers					
	The Punch		*The Guardian*		*Total*	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
• Religious Sentiments	10	5.36	14	7.07	24	6.23
• Ethnic/Tribal/Sectional tendencies	6	3.21	9	4.55	15	3.89
• Violence inviting	3	1.60	7	3.54	10	2.59
• Personal attacks	70	37.43	88	44.44	158	41.04
• Hate messages	4	2.13	3	1.52	7	1.82
• Others	94	50.27	77	38.88	171	44.42
Total	**187**	**100**	**111**	**100**	**385**	**100**

In Table 1 we saw that a greater proportion (63.11%) of the 2015 Nigerian general election political ads were based on non-issues. Table 3 shows a breakdown of the facts and figures. Of the 385 non-issues identified in the two newspapers, personal attacks and "other" categories stand out. Personal attack ads amounted to 41.04% while "other" accounted for 44.42%. An example of personal attack ad read thus: "…Buhari may be asking for change. But he will never change! Nigeria needs a true nationalist to pilot its affairs, not an ethnic jingoist or disguised religious fanatic." This ad was sponsored by the Nigerian Integrity and Justice Forum and published in *The Guardian* of Wednesday January 21, 2015, p.11. Another personal attack ad from *The Punch* of February 3, 2015 read: "On February 14, do your duty to Nigeria. Vote out the Commander-in-Chief under whose watch, a minister spent 10 billion naira to hire private jets. Nigeria deserves better than Goodluck". This one was sponsored by the Restoration Group.

The "other" category contained no issues. Rather, they dealt with, laudatory messages, invitations to rallies, entreaties to vote or donate to the parties or such other goodwill or celebratory messages. For both newspapers, their occurrence was significant at 44.42% but they were bland, innocuous ads that neither dealt with issues nor posed any danger or threat to the polity.

However, religious sentiments were invoked in 6.23% of the ads. Examine this: "Who is allowing the Islamisation of Nigeria...? Jonathan's failure of leadership has allowed parts of Nigeria to be Islamised" – *The Punch,* January 25, 2015. Another ad in *The Guardian* of Thursday March 8, 2015, p. 55 stated: "A dictator hiding behind another pastor. Is this the kind of change you want?"

Likewise a few ads (3.89%) raked the ethnic, tribal, and sectional sentiments as seen in both newspapers. For example, the ad in *The Punch* of Tuesday March 24, 2015 at page 24, read: "What does the first family feel about Northerners? *Our men no dey born children truway for street. We no dey like the people for that side* – Patience Jonathan talking about Almajiris at a campaign rally in Calabar. Help stamp out prejudice and tribalism. Another ad from the opposite political camp read, "Buhari "loves the Igbos, but he dislikes one of their revered fathers…While he "detained" Shagari, a fellow Fulani in a comfortable executive lodge at Ikoyi, he threw Alex Ekweme into Kirikiri prison like a common criminal for no offence" – This was sponsored by Independent Campaign Group and published by *The Guardian* of Wednesday, January 14, 2015, p. 32.

Similarly, a very small proportion (2.59%) of the ads bore messages that could incite violence. One example sponsored by Concerned Democrats of Nigeria and published in *The Punch* on February 4, 2015 at page 52 stated: "APC wants power through violence. Nigerians are watching".

It is also to be noted that hate messages gleaned from the analysed political ads occurred at a very small incidence of 1.82%. In summary therefore, the data in this study show clearly that political advertising for the 2015 Nigerian general elections when they were dealing with non issues were mainly about harmless laudatory/celebratory messages (44.42%) or scathing personal attacks (41.04%). The use of religious/ethnic/sectional sentiments as well as violent and hate messages occurred at a much more minimal rate.

(d) Sponsorship of Political ads
Table 4:Sponsors of the 2015 General Election Political ads

Sponsors	Newspapers				Total	
	The Punch		*The Guardian*			
	n	%	n	%	n	%
• Peoples Democratic Party	115	38.21	86	27.83	201	32.95
• All Progressive Congress	54	17.94	53	17.15	107	17.54
• Others e.g. SDP and UPN	1	0.33	2	0.65	3	0.49
• Non Political Parties	122	40.53	162	52.43	284	46.56
• Unidentified Actors	9	2.99	6	1.94	15	2.45
Total	**301**	**100**	**309**	**100**	**610**	**100**

Table 4 indicates that a greater portion of the political ads during the 2015 general election in Nigeria was sponsored by non political party actors (46.56%). It also shows that apart from the two major political parties namely, the People Democratic Party and the All Progressives Congress, the other political groups played little or no role (0.49%) in political advertising. The study has also shown the role of non political party advertisers such as Alliance for Purposeful Governance, Committee for Good Governance, Nigerian Christian Network, Foundation for Promotion of Good Economy, Goodluck Lagos Grassroots Project, Transformation Ambassadors of Nigeria, Change Ambassadors of Nigeria, etc. These groups in addition to the political parties were responsible for much of the non compliant political ads. However, unidentified sponsorship which is clearly non compliant with the APCON code occurred at a low rate of 2.45%.

(e) Compliance with Political Advertising (APCON Code)
Table 5: Status of Compliance

Compliance Status	Newspapers					
	The Punch		*The Guardian*		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
• Compliant	211	70.10	194	62.78	405	66.39
• Non-Compliant	90	29.90	115	37.22	205	33.61
Total	**301**	**100**	**309**	**100**	**610**	**100**

Table 5 indicates that of the 610 political ad copies analysed in this study, 66.39% complied with the APCON code on political advertising. Regard personal attacks, use of ethnic, tribal, sectional, religious sentiment, resort to violent and hate messages as well as the identification of sponsors and the recourse to issue-based advertising. The data provided here also points to the fact that the rate of non-compliance at 33.61% is rather high and calls for urgent action to be taken by political actors, electoral agencies, advertising regulators as well as media channels if the political/democratic sphere is to be sanitised.

6. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations
The summary of findings of this study is as follows:
- The study has shown that 610 political ads were captured in the 2015 Nigerian general election from the period: January 1 to March 31, 2015. Of this number 63.11% of the ads dealt with non issues while 36. 89% pertained to issues. This finding is not much different from the one in Obot and Batta (2012).
- Regarding issue-based ads, the study indicates that socio-cultural issues constituted the main chunk of the issues at 54.67% whereas economic issues garnered 39.11% while political issues earned a paltry 6.22%. Holtz Bacha *et. al.*(2012) observed emphasis on economic issues in their European study.
- Concerning the specifics of the non-issue based political ads, the study has shown that the use of bland, neutral, laudatory, celebratory messages ranked high (44.42%) followed by personal attacks (41.04%) and far down by religious sentiments (6.23%). Recourse to ethnic, tribal, sectional tendencies, and violent/hate messages occurred at far lower rates ranging from 3.89% to 1.82%. This particular finding affirms the functional theory of campaign discourse as Roberts (2013) explains that, "politicians use campaign messages to make themselves appear to be more preferable than opponents" (p.28).
- The incidence of non compliance with political advertising code enunciated by APCON was high at 33.61%. This is because, non-descript (non political party) actors often hiding behind emergency political groups; or political party which hide behind amorphous groups are responsible for 46.56% of the political advertising in Nigeria which failed to comply with APCON code.

The conclusion of this study is that newspapers in Nigeria, whether elitist such as *The Guardian* or popular such as *The Punch* continue to be a veritable channel for the dissemination of political advertising messages thus helping to deepen the public sphere as well as the political/democratic domain. This is in Sync with the theorisation on the mediatisation of politics (Block, 2013). However, based on our analysis of political advertising in these two newspapers, the study has confirmed that political advertising in Nigeria is largely not

based on issues and when it is so based, social/cultural welfare issues dominate buttressing Hsu and Barker's (2013) point that, "mass media institutions play a significant role in maintaining and reinforcing the…culture (p.696). Again, when the non-issues in the ad copies were disserted, it is concluded that political advertising in the two Nigerian newspapers deployed neutral messages, personal attacks and to a very little extent religious, ethnic, tribal and sectional sentiments.

On the bases of these conclusions, it is recommended that:

(a) Media proprietors and professionals should help reduce the incidence of non-compliant political ads by insisting on adherence to the code.

(b) Electoral agencies should apply punitive sanctions on political advertisers who disobey the laws on political advertising.

(c) APCON should as empowered by law, penalise both the advertisers and the media firms that fail to comply with legislation on political advertising.

(d) Civil society organisations should build capacity among political stakeholders on conducting issue-based political advertising to induce social cohesion, national unity and democratic ethos as well de-emphasising negative advertising.

(e) The electorate: the target of political advertisements should also contribute to propagating a more tolerant political atmosphere by denying political actors who resort to unwholesome advertising tactics, the much needed votes.

(f) Political advertisers are instrumental to the entrenchment of decorus advertising campaign by committing to practice that is based on fundamental, structural, constitutional, legal, procedural, economic, political, social, cultural, ethical, and administrative issues.

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