



Campaign Billboards as Veritable Sources of Information for the Nigerian Electorate: A Case Study of Benin City.

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Abstract

This study examined campaign posters and billboards as veritable sources of information for Nigerian electorates in the 2023 Presidential, national, and state assembly elections. The research was limited to Benin and delimited to Ugbowo, headquarters of Egho local government area of Edo State, Nigeria. The objective was to establish if people read campaign posters and billboards and if the respondents considered them as sources of information. This study employed a descriptive survey method. A total of one hundred questionnaires (100) were distributed and eighty-nine (89) were retrieved. The findings revealed that 80 respondents (89.89%) considered campaign posters and billboards as sources of information for electorates. Campaign posters and billboards were read for information, especially for the manifesto. The study recommended amongst others that information managers and librarians should consider the use of posters and billboards in sensitization campaigns.

Keywords: Campaign, Billboard, Information, Nigeria, Electorate.

Introduction

Advertising is one of the strongest means of communication. In the world today, it is a fast medium to create awareness, rouse attention, win acceptance and get public affirmation. The model of outdoor billboards' pattern of advertising has come a long way in Nigeria and has gained drive prior to independence (Ogunlade, 2011). Advertising started officially in Nigeria in 1928. This was with the birth of West African Publicity Limited, a division of the United African Company (U.A.C). The company was created to serve the propaganda needs of the British colonists. From those early days, one advertising medium that is employed generously is the billboard.

Billboard is a medium for advertising in public spaces in several countries. Billboards fall into the category of outdoor advertisements mounted in strategic places to gain people's attention. Outdoor advertising like billboards is a catalyst for enhancing economic growth and driving market forces through the promotion of sales and economic attractiveness (Kayode, 2015).

Billboards are made of steel poles, angle bars, and flex banners. They are constructed in various shapes: square, rectangular, etc. They can be mounted on the ground, rooftops, or side of buildings in any public space. The intended message is printed on a flex banner which is attached to the steel or iron angle bars. Posters on the other hand are either made of paper or flex banners but small enough to be hung or pasted in smaller spaces.

Billboards are media for political campaign advertising. These have become veritable tools for information dissemination by modern-day politicians. Major intercity, interstate roads, city streets, and public places are adorned with billboards and posters. This pattern of politicking has assumed a wider and more significant dimension in political campaigns in the recent past in Nigeria. It is fair to say that billboard and campaign posters advertising in Nigerian general elections has sky rocked.

Campaign posters and billboards are used worldwide for various causes ranging from political to socio-economic issues. The campaign is the period when the political parties put forward their candidates and arguments with which they hope to persuade people to vote for their candidates and parties. Political campaigns need the involvement and committed support of people. From student union elections in tertiary institutions to local government, state, and national elections, it takes campaigns to elect an official, and campaign posters and billboards constitute part of the process.

Daily Trust (17th February 2022) stated that *"The main campaigning that first sets in are mounting of small/huge billboards bearing the pictures and party logo of potential candidates on roadsides, buildings, bridges, metal poles of streetlights. Daily Trust Saturday noticed that the members of the two leading political parties in the country – All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are taking the lead in this politicking. Major roads ... host different campaign billboards..."*

Again, This Day (9th March, 2023) found that the *"Use of posters and billboards is also significant. Like every election year, political posters of various parties and politicians are currently competing for spaces in all the towns and cities of the 36 states of Nigeria including the federal capital territory (FCT). It is expected because posters and leaflets are among the cheapest means of communication during electioneering campaigns, compared to billboards or ad placement in newspapers, radio, or television."*

Election posters play major roles in publicizing and promoting a candidate and distinguishing him or her from his/her opposition. Campaign posters and billboards amongst many would most often indicate the name of a candidate, the political party, and the manifesto sometimes stated as a slogan. Campaign billboards can be a successful way of promoting yourself and increasing your chances of winning come Election Day.

With billboards on the increase, does that suggest the effectiveness of information distribution? Billboards and posters create room for regular and repeated exposure to the displayed information because they are usually positioned on roads with heavy human and vehicular traffic. Therefore, people are constantly exposed to the political message on billboards and posters. Billboards and posters are more flexible in locational positional and display especially in places where verbal communication will be near impossible.

Theoretical Framework

This research work is based on the framework of social relationship theory. The social relationship theory posits that people's reaction to a message will be modified or conditioned by their informal social relationship with their "Significant Other" viz relations, friends, or social group (Okenwa, 2007). The individual difference theory was propounded by Albert Adler. It is a theory of human behavior that centers on the fundamental need for belonging and the importance of engaging in constructive actions. Adler believed that all behaviour is goal-directed, and each individual is driven to seek "belonging" or significance and meaning in their lives by the way they function in social systems which are influenced by the information at their disposal (Sperry & Sperry 2020).

Literature Review

Outdoor advertisement in Nigeria is a growing marketing tactic that Sinclair (2006) observed has become a part of everyday culture, adds beauty to the environment, a source of valueable information for economic and political education. The Outdoor Advertising Agency of Nigeria (2005) as cited in Okosun and Jiburum (2015) detected that outdoor advertisement billboards are intended to catch a person's attention and create a quite but memorable impression.

This research work is anchored on the individual and the social relationship theories. The social relationship theory posits that people's reaction to a message will be modified or conditioned by their informal social relationship with their "Significant Other" viz relations, friends, or social group (Okenwa, 2007). The individual difference theory posits that the audience of mass communication is made up of individuals who have various psychological makeup (Harold, 1920).

Kotler and Levy (1969) were probably the first to explore the relationship between elections and advertising, a category into which campaign billboards fall. As the media are part of the lives of many people. It is, therefore, acceptable when Hodgson and Berman (1997) opined that billboards are an efficient and effective way to convey advertising messages to the public and will be best suited for the structure of our cities and our transportation networks. This is because of the strength of billboards is in their outlandish and extravagant prints. Billboard through the power of colorful photography appeals more to people's eyes. Burke (1999) noted that the media is a part of people's daily life of which campaign billboards are a part. Burke posited that several empirical studies have shown that the media can have an immense educational impact on public opinion and behavior. Goldstein (2002) pointed out that campaign posters and billboards as sources/instruments of political advertising affect voter turnout.

However, McCaffery (1962) observed that campaign posters and billboards constitute advertising because “advertising wins elections”. This is because Berry and Goldman (1989) described campaign billboards as processes of “political socialization”. Political socialization is a course of action through which individuals become conscious of politics, find out political facts, and shape political principles. In the same vein, Udeagwu (2002) argued that political billboard is a radical socialization and education tool. This is because they act as signposts or announcements platforms for political sensitization. Okigbo (1992) and Opeibi (2005) were then right to have called the culture of campaign billboards “marketing politics”. Aghara, Nwaizugbo, Chukwuemeka, and Onyeizugbe (2015) opined that billboards are important for product marketing. Political parties, their candidates, and party manifestos are products that ought to be sold to the electorates who are the consumers in the market of political ideas.

Akpan and Edewor (2005) stated that in Nigerian politics, posters form a significant part of political campaigns, and voters get drawn to a well-colored poster showing a clear and large picture of a candidate with a short message carrying a theme. This is because according to Brader (2006), campaign billboards are part of the appeal to hearts and mind that win over voters. So, Westen (2007) noted that campaign posters and billboards play an emotional role in elections.

Akpan and Udeze (2013) in their study “The Influence of Political Advertising on the Nigerian Electorate, Journal of Communication found that the respondents were influenced in their choice of candidates to the extent that they perceived such messages to be credible. They concluded that political advertising was an essential factor in the political decisions of the electorate in Imo State

Wateraid (2007) averred that the media can influence decisions indirectly as it places pressure on people to act. Thus, the use of media like campaign posters and billboards can change people’s attitudes and behavior. Stanton (2012) pointed out that the purpose of billboards is to catch customer attention. He noted that billboards significant influence on the purchasing habits of people who live in cities. Orji (2002) pointed out that billboards get the attention of people in urban areas more because of their attractive aesthetic and artistic qualities.

Kayode, Obielodan, and Ogunduyile (2012) in their study on the Relationship between the Use of Language on Billboard Advertisements and Consumers’ Urge to Purchase Products in Lagos State, Nigeria, explained that billboards have the capacity to appeal to all categories of persons: young or old, literate, or illiterate, noble, or ignoble. The result of the study reveals that there is no significant relationship between the use of language on billboard advertisements and consumers’ urge to purchase products in Lagos State. But the language of expression is an important factor when campaigning for product patronage and that, adopting the appropriate language of expression on outdoor billboards influences and provokes consumers’ desire to purchase products. This is because billboards “Can reach all - their o language.

The above is possible as Burant (2009) pointed out that posters present an ideology and drive specific cause tracing the origin of campaign posters and billboards to 1600s but it changed the political landscape of the nation by 1891. Macintyre (2010) noted that in the United Kingdom, Tories have stuck to the same method of campaign billboards for ages. The basis of this is found in what Omozuwa and Ezejideaku (2009) observed. They stressed that Campaign billboards play a part in developing political language in any election. Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2010) found that

billboards and posters affect the language of elections. This language according “is constructed to champion and promote individual interest”.

Good (2011) in tracing the evolution of campaign posters and billboards in the United States of America pointed out that John Quincy Adams became the first presidential candidate to widely use posters in 1824, according to the University of Virginia's Miller Center. However, the oldest American campaign posters and billboards are credited to William Henry Harrison, a presidential candidate in 1840.

Olanuhun (8th March 2011) blogged that the campaign by poster was becoming an aesthetic menace for Lagosians. This is due to the defacing and arbitrary nature of their placement. Ugwu and Mgbo (2010) opined that the use of media like campaign posters and billboards play a part in influencing people's decision in an election. This influence on participation is called “political socialization”. Nworah (2011) stated that campaign posters and billboards aid the “selling the Nigerian politicians”. Smith (13th January 2011, The Guardian) posited that campaign billboards as part of print media are very relevant in Nigeria's political consciousness.

Ikem (2012) in discussing social media trends and elections in Nigeria mentioned billboards as a medium to get political messages out faster, easier, cheaper, and stronger. Ngwoke, (2019) in “Public Perceptions of Billboard Advertising During The 2015 General Election Campaign Period”, observed that the billboard is a powerful advertising tool for politicians. The study found that billboards do not affect voting behaviours. While the billboards are admired the message was to affect their views about the choice of candidate in the election.

Bassey and Eteng (2021, P.1688) in their study “Impact of Outdoor Advertisement Posters and Billboards In Nigerian Urban Environment”, pointed out the negative consequences of billboards. “Information Overload: Most often the over-concentration or excessive clustering of advertisement media in one location in the study area could lead to information overload. Information overload leads to confusion, disorientation, distortion of reality, extreme irritability and therefore a decrease in the effectiveness of outdoor advertisement messages.”

The research concluded that political advertising and election campaign are synonymous. This literature review has shown that no work of such was carried out in Edo State. This research is therefore an attempt to fill this vacuum.

Statement of Problem

In Nigeria, the evolution of campaign posters and billboards has not been documented. Political campaigns in Nigeria employ various media and languages (Abdullahi-Idiagbo, 2010) and the use of posters and billboards is rife in Nigeria. While posters are pasted on buses, walls; traffic wardens stand, bridges, amongst many other places, billboards are strategically erected in city centers, road junctions, rooftops, and commercial vehicles. Olofinula (2011) referred to it as “poster politics”. For the 14th February Presidential/National Assembly and 25th March 2023 state House of Assembly elections in Edo State, for instance, campaign posters and billboards of aspirants flooded major streets and city centers in Benin City (see Appendix 1 for ideologies and messages on the campaign posters and billboards). The four major presidential aspirants were Senator Ahmed Bola Tinubu, All Progressive Congress (APC); Atiku Abubakar, People's Democratic Party (PDP); Mr Peter Obi, Labour Party (LP), and Rabiu Kwankwaso, New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP), In the

battle to win over voters through various media, various parts of Benin City, for instance, have become awash with campaign posters and billboards (Otabor, 2022; <http://digitalize.nigeria.com/2011/08/11/oshiomhole%e2%80%99s-campaign-posters-flood-auchi/>) In spite of this poster battle and the enormous cost that go into its production, do people take time to read them? This research, therefore, seeks to find out if campaign posters and billboards are sources of information for voters in elections.

Political advertising has no doubt served as a good political communication medium through which political candidates attempt to market themselves to the electorate. These persuasive messages produce varying reactions from different segments of the electorate, either in favour or against a candidate or political party. This study concludes that political advertising does influence the electorate in its voting decisions but that it is to the extent that the electorate regards the advertising messages as credible. Political advertising has no doubt served as a good political communication medium through which political candidates attempt to market themselves to the electorate. These persuasive messages produce varying reactions from different segments of the electorate, either in favour or against a candidate or political party. This study concludes that political advertising does influence the electorate in its voting decisions but that it is to the extent that the electorate regards the advertising messages as credible.

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Research Questions

1. Do people read political campaign billboards?
2. Are political campaign billboards sources of information for voters?
3. Do political campaign billboards influence people's decisions to vote?
4. Are political campaign billboards a waste?

Methodology

This study employed the descriptive survey in seeking to investigate if campaign billboards are veritable sources of information for voters in elections in Nigeria. This study particularly focused on Benin City the Edo state capital. Benin City as a State capital cuts across Oredo and Egor Local government areas respectively. The distribution of the questionnaire was done in Uselu and Oba Palace quarters respectively both by the researcher and research assistants from the 11th to 31st of January 2023. The questionnaire employed as a research instrument had 10 items. Of the one hundred questionnaires distributed through random selection 89 (89%) were retrieved and found useful.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Research Question

Do people read political campaign billboards?

Table 1.1

Question 1	Answer		
	Yes	No	Can't Remember
Did you see any campaign billboard in the last four months to the 2023 general election?	79	7	3

(Source –Field Work, 2023)

As shown in Table 1.1, 79 persons (88.76%) indicated they had seen campaign billboards in the last four months while 7 (7.87%) did not. However, 3 (3.37%) cannot remember if they ever sighted campaign posters or billboards. This appears to justify the claim of Otabor (2022) that Benin City is awash with campaign posters and billboards. It also strengthens the notion that political parties have come to see campaign posters and billboards as a strong medium for passing information to the public. Thus, campaign billboards bring about serious election sensitization for the citizenry.

Table 1.2

Question 2	Answer		
	Yes	No	Can't Remember
Do you read campaign billboards before the 2023 General elections?	75	12	2

(Source –Field Work, 2023)

While 79 persons (88.76%) in Table 1.2 claimed to have seen election campaign billboards in the last four months, 75 persons (84.27%) read the information carried by them. Of the 89 respondents, 12 (13.48%) did not read while 2 (2.25%) can't remember if they did. The passion to read the posters and billboards seem to establish the political consciousness of the readers and justify that campaign posters and billboards serve as a source of information for the electorate in Benin City.

Research Question

Are political campaign billboards a source of information for voters?

Table 2.1 Purpose of reading campaign billboards

Question 3	Answer		
Why do you read campaign billboards?	Information	No Reason	I don't Read
	73	4	12

(Source –Field Work, 2012)

Information is key to reading campaign billboards. While 77 persons (86.52%) actually read the campaign posters and billboards, 73 persons (82.02%) did for information while 4 (4.49%) read them for no reason. Of the 89 respondents, 12 (13.48%) stated they did not read the messages carried by the campaign posters and billboards. Since information is the currency on which every election runs, it is not out of place to have seen the various political parties and candidates for election placing several posters and billboards in strategic locations of the city to carry their messages across with the mind to woo voters and curry their favour.

Table 2.2 – What the public look out for in Billboards.

Question 4	Answer		
What do you look out for in a campaign billboards?	Candidates Name	Manifesto	Nothing
	33	46	10

(Source –Field Work, 2012)

Apart from the information drive shown in Table 2.1 of the 89 respondents, 46 persons (51.69%) read campaign posters and billboards to understand the manifestoes of the political parties and candidates seeking political offices. However, 33 persons (37.08%) read them to know the candidates name while 10 persons (11.24%) read then with no objective in mind. About 50% of respondents read billboards because of manifesto reason. A manifesto is a public declaration of policy, intentions, objectives, motives and aims, especially one issued before an election by a political party or candidate. This helps the electorate to weigh the policy direction and options to determine the best candidate that will contribute meaningfully to the development of the people. However, it is interesting that one-third of the respondents (37.08%) read campaign posters and billboards to ascertain the name of the candidate seeking political office. This is because, since

governance is predicated upon personalities, the candidates' track records might speak on their behalf or disqualify them in the reckoning of the electorate. This appeared to be the ground of the Labour Party campaign poster "We no dey give shishi" (Fieldwork, 2023).

Table 2.2

Question 5	Answer		
	Candidates Name	Manifesto	Party
Which information does campaign posters and billboards carry that may influence people?	16	43	30

(Source –Field Work, 2023)

As shown in Table 2.2, 48.31% of the respondents affirmed that the message from campaign billboards that may likely influence people is the party manifesto. This is because a manifesto is a catalyst for what is to come when either a party or candidate assumes political office. A manifesto outlines the programme and principles of a party or candidate and helps the electorates to know what to expect if the candidate is elected. However, 30 persons (33.71%) read campaign billboards to know the party while 16 (17.98%) did for the candidate's name. The figures showed that manifesto and party identity rank highest in the information need of readers of campaign billboards.

Table 2.3

Question 6	Answer		
	Yes	No	Not At All
Do you consider campaign posters and billboards as sources of information?	80	6	3

(Source –Field Work, 2023)

Table 2.3 revealed that 80 respondents (89.89%) agree that campaign billboards are veritable sources of information. This might appear to be the reason for the passion to understand the messages passed across by them in the candidate's name, party, and manifesto. Thus, campaign billboards play a great role in informing the electorate of election combatants. However, 9 persons (10.11%) do not consider campaign billboards as sources of information. The number of respondents who accepts that campaign posters and billboards are sources of information is overwhelming.

Table 2.4

Question 7	Answer		
What attracts you to a campaign posters and billboards?	Graphics	Information	Nothing
	29	53	7

(Source –Field Work, 2012)

Table 2.4 furthers the result of Table 2.3 which revealed that campaign billboards are considered veritable sources of information. In Table 2.4, 53 respondents (59.5%) are attracted to read campaign billboards because of information. What is considered information are manifestoes, the candidate's name, and political parties. However, 29 (32.58%) respondents are attracted by the graphic quality, while 7 persons (7.87%) do sometimes for no actual reason.

Research Question 3

Do political campaign posters and billboards influence people's decisions to vote?

Table 3

Question 8	Answer		
Have you ever voted in any election in the last four years?	Yes	No	Can't Remember
	60	26	3

(Source –Field Work, 2023)

As show in Table 3, whereas 60 or 67.4% of the respondents claimed billboards had influenced their decisions to vote, 26 or 29.2% of respondents claimed not influenced.

Table 3.1

Question 9	Answer		
Has campaign posters and billboards ever influenced your decision to vote?	Yes	No	Can't Remember
	24	62	3

(Source –Field Work, 2023)

It is surprising to discover from the figures in Table 3.1 that campaign billboards do not overwhelmingly influence electorates' decisions to vote. This is because, in Tables 2.3 and 2.4 respectively, information was the reason for reading the election billboard. Similarly, in Table 2.1 and 2.2 respectively, the manifesto was affirmed as the strongest reason for reading campaign billboards.

In Table 3.1 above, 62 persons (69.66%) revealed that campaign billboards have never influenced their decision to vote, while it has done so for 24 persons (26.97%). There is a very strong gap

between the drive to read posters and billboards for information and their ability to influence the readers. While the reason for such a gap is outside the scope of this research, it will be worth researching to establish the causes for such obvious and blatant disregard for the information passed across from billboards.

Research Question 4

Are political campaign billboards an exercise in futility?

Table 4

Question 10	Answer		
	Yes	No	I don't know
Do you consider campaign poster and billboards and billboard a waste?	12	70	7

(Source –Field Work, 2023)

In Table 4 above, 70 persons (78.65%) felt that campaign billboards are not exercises in futility. However, 12 persons (13.48%) are of the opinion that they are while 7 persons (7.87%) don't know if they are. The strong conclusion that it is not a wasteful exercise might be because of the information need of the electorate that campaign billboards satisfy.

Discussion of Findings

People read campaign billboards. This finding agrees with Kotler and Levy (1969) who pointed out that there is a relationship between elections and advertising as the media is part of the lives of many people. In the same vein, Hodgson, and Berman (1997) established that billboards are an efficient and effective way to convey messages to the public and are better suited for the makeup of our cities. So, people do read campaign billboards.

Again, the study found that Campaign billboards are veritable sources of information for electorates in Nigeria. This also agrees with Akpan and Edewor (2005) who noted that in Nigerian politics, media types like billboards catch the attention of voters with their large picture of a candidate with a short message carrying a theme. According to Brader (2006), campaign billboards appeal to hearts and minds that win over voters.

Campaign billboards influence the direction of people's decisions to vote in elections. Campaign billboards do not overwhelmingly influence electorates' decisions to vote. This is because information and the candidate's manifestos were the reason for reading the election billboard. Campaign billboards never influenced their decision to vote. This finding is in line with that of Ngwoke, (2019) who disclosed that campaign billboards don't influence voting behaviours or the choice of a candidate in an election.

Campaign posters and billboards are not a waste of time and resources. This is because of the information need of the electorate which campaign billboards satisfy. This finding buys into the statement of Nworah (2011) that campaign billboards assist in "selling the Nigerian politicians".

This is also supported by Smith (13th January 2011, The Guardian) who postulated that campaign billboards raise political consciousness. In fact, Ikem (2012) noted that billboards help to get political messages out quicker, simpler, inexpensive, and deeper.

Recommendations

1. Political parties should find out why campaign posters and billboards don't really influence the direction of the electorate's decision to vote in any election.
2. Government information managers should tap into the power of posters and billboards as a core part of information dissemination of government policies and projects.
3. Librarians should consider the use of posters and billboards in their public library education and sensitization campaigns.
4. The government should enact laws that would punish those who deface public places with political billboards.

Conclusion

Billboards are media through which information is sold to the public. This is evident in the sheer number of pasted campaign-mounted billboards by the APC, LP, and PDP in several areas around Benin City. In political campaigns, billboards of parties and candidates appear imposingly on streets and strategic places carrying several messages. The multiplicity of these campaign billboards reveals their importance in selling messages to the public to win over their hearts and minds. Librarians and information scientists can draw upon this selling power to sensitize the public about issues of public concern. This research has concluded that campaign billboards are sources of information for the electorates. This is because an overwhelming number of the research population read campaign billboards to get informed. However, why the information derived does not influence the respondent's direction and decision to vote in an election is worthy of investigation.

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APPENDIX (1)

POLITICAL CAMPAIGN BILLBOARDS

