

**A STUDY OF PROPAGANDA AND NEWSPAPER OWNERSHIP
INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL ADVERTISING IN
SELECT NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS**

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of media ownership on publication of political advertisements with propaganda elements by the Nigerian newspapers. Three national newspapers in Nigeria namely: *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Nigerian Pilot* were selected for the study. The methodology of the study was the analytical research approach known as Content Analysis. Data for the study were obtained through a systematic sampling procedure of dividing the total population of the three national dailies (453) by the sample size of 181. Simple percentages and Chi-square statistical tool were adopted as the analytical tools for the study. Findings revealed that ownership influences were responsible for widespread publication of negative propaganda elements in political advertisements in Nigeria as newspapers funded by certain politicians and/ or political parties were discovered to have favoured such party's candidates in their publication of these elements. The study then recommended that the mass media should strive to rise above overbearing ownership influence and maintain high standards of professionalism by remaining fair, firm, credible and objective in every aspect of the practice; strict political neutrality was also recommended for media professionals.

Key words: Advertising, Influence, Ownership, Newspapers, Propaganda

Introduction

Propagandists use a variety of propaganda techniques to influence opinions and to express their views (O'Shanghnessy, 2004). Often, these techniques rely on some elements of manipulation, by either omitting significant information or distorting it. Generally the term propaganda is often associated with negative connotations. However, the word propaganda originates from the Latin language which means expansion and derives from the verb "propagare". The first time the word was recorded in writing was in 1622, and was used by Pope Gregory XV as he

established the *congregation de propaganda fide* (Brahm, 2006). Today's definition of the term propaganda means a concerted set of messages aimed at influencing the opinions or behaviour of a large number of people. Furthermore, we could say that the term is more or less a persuasive advertisement (Dick, 1998).

Modern propaganda is distinguished from other forms of communication in that it is consciously and deliberately used to influence group attitudes; all other functions are secondary. Thus, almost any attempt to sway public opinion, including lobbying, commercial advertising, missionary work, as well as political advertising can be broadly construed as propaganda. Generally however, the term, as used in this study is restricted to the manipulation of political beliefs. Although allusions to propaganda can be found in ancient writings (e.g. Aristotle's), the organised use of propaganda did not develop until after the industrial revolution, when modern instruments of communication first enabled propagandists to easily reach mass audiences. The printing press for example made it possible for Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* to reach a large number of American colonists. Later, during the 20th Century, the advent of radio and television enabled propagandists to reach even greater number of people (O'Shanghnessy, 2004).

In addition to the development of modern media, the rise of total warfare and political movements also contributed to the growing importance of propaganda in the 20th Century. Adolf Hitler of Germany and Benito Mussolini of Italy also used propaganda especially in oratory, to develop and maintain the support of the masses. During World War II, all the warring nations employed propaganda, often called psychological warfare, to boost civilian and military morale as well as demoralise the enemies. The U.S Agency, charged with disseminating wartime propaganda was the office of war information. In the postwar era, propaganda activities continued to play a major role in world affairs (Meerloo, 1999). In addition, certain refinements of the propaganda techniques have been developed; most notable among these is brainwashing, the intensive indoctrination of political opponents against their will (*The Free Dictionary*, 2016).

Propaganda is a concerted set of messages aimed at influencing the opinion or behaviour of a large number of people. As opposed to impartial provision of information, propaganda in its basic sense presents information in order to influence its audiences. Propaganda often presents facts selectively (thus lying by omission) to encourage a particular thesis, or give loaded messages in order to produce an emotional, rather than rational response to the information presented. The desired result is a change of the cognitive narrative of the subject in the target audience to further a political agenda (Brown, 1963). Many have pointed out that the most

effective propaganda campaign relies heavily on selective truth telling, the confusion of means and ends, and the presentation of a simple idyllic vision that glosses over uncomfortable realities (Brahm 2006).

Psychologists Pratkanis and Aronson (2001) recommend four strategies for a successful propaganda campaign. The first point is the importance of the persuasion. That is, the propagandist should attempt to create a climate in which the message is more likely to be believed. Second is the credibility of the source. He or she should be a likeable or authoritative communicator. Third, the message should be focused on simple, achievable goals. And, finally, the message should arouse the emotions of the recipient and provide a target response. Advertising on its part encourages the desire for consumer goods, services and ideas using suggestive images and captions. However, the motivation to buy what is advertised may stem from the belief promoted by what propaganda is. Through advertising, propaganda influences one emotionally to buy certain products, services and ideas. Advertisers cash in on one's latent desire to be rich, better looking or more popular to "direct" one's purchasing habits. Propaganda is used by advertisers to influence consumer spending by presenting what is "desirable" (Stafen, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

The media, according to Dahlgren (2009), have over the years served as liaison between politicians and the electorate. They act politically within the framework of the broader societal system, and today their mediation in the polity's operation with the development and the constant involvement of technology is powerful. A fundamental element of the centrality of the media to today's politics is a near-instantaneous delivery of political events and issues. By any objective standard, the media institutions are critically important to government and politics. Most significant is the extent to which politicians use various methods through the media to communicate with their constituencies. Regrettably however, this provision is allegedly abused by both politicians and the media institutions, who are said to have manipulated it to the detriment of the masses. The common scenario in Nigeria is the free use of the media, especially the print and electronic for deliberate praise-singing, outright name calling and character assassination.

Most Nigerian Newspapers today are believed to support certain political candidates during electioneering. For instance, there are several newspapers, most of which are allegedly owned by politicians to further their political interests during elections. Examples of such newspapers include *The Nation* believed to be owned by Sen. Ahmed Bola Tinubu, a former Governor of Lagos State and a Chieftain of the All Progressives Congress (APC). *Nigerian Pilot* is believed to be owned by Mr.

Dennis Sami and former presidential aide to ex-President Goodluck Jonathan, while *The Punch*, established some forty years ago by the Aboderins appears to remain neutral to political interests.

Therefore the major question remains: To what extent did ownership influence affect the use of propaganda elements in the 2015 Presidential electioneering advertisements between November 2014 and March 2015?

Research Questions

- i. What was the relationship between ownership influence and the publication of presidential campaign advertisements with propaganda elements in *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Nigerian Pilot* newspapers?
- ii. How frequent was the use of political propaganda elements in political advertisements by *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Nigerian Pilot* newspapers?
- iii. Which propaganda elements were most commonly used in the presidential campaign advertisements?

Conceptual Review

The term propaganda has a universally negative connotation. Most people believe it is more of an exercise of deception than persuasion. Partisans of political parties often use propaganda to dismiss any claims made by their opponents, while at the same time professing never to employ propaganda themselves. To some degree, propaganda shares certain similarities with advertising and public relations, but it is mostly used for political purposes. Propaganda has become a frequent element of politics and war. As new communication technologies develop, propagandists may have to develop new methods to reach increasingly large audiences in order to shape their views. The shift in recent times to target mass audiences and not just elite publics has been perceived by some scholars as new propaganda.

Propaganda is usually designed to manipulate others' beliefs and induce some action in the interest of the propagator by drilling the message into the listeners' heads. It involves the use of slogans, images or symbols to influence emotions and actions. As Brahm (2006) notes, the ultimate goal of propaganda is to entice the recipient of the message to willingly accept the propagandist's position as if it was one's own. Propaganda may be aimed at one's own people or at members of other groups. It can also be designed to agitate a population or appease it. People often think of propaganda as false information that is meant to reassure those who already believe. Believing what is false may create cognitive dissonance which people will be eager to eliminate. Therefore propaganda is often directed at those who are already sympathetic to the message in order to help them overcome this discomfort (Enoch, 2014). This claim finds justification in the words of Hellinger and Brooks (1991):

propaganda generally aims to construct the self as a noble strong person to which individuals in the domestic population

can feel connected. At the same time, propaganda often attempts to rally the domestic public to action creating fear, confusion, and hatred by portraying the antagonist as an abominable figure.

Propagandists often conceal their purpose and even their identity, in order to distract the public. White propaganda, for instance, is mostly from a correctly identifiable source and is not intentionally deceptive. Black propaganda by contrast is purposefully deceptive in giving the impression that the source is friendly. Finally the grey propaganda has been used to describe propaganda that falls in between.

Taxonomy of Propaganda

The various types of propaganda are classified according to the source and nature of the message. Modern studies of propaganda according to Olatunji and Laninhun (2013) utilize various schemas to classify different types of propaganda activities. One such categorization classifies propaganda as white, gray, or black according to the degree to which the sponsor conceals or acknowledges its involvement.

White Propaganda

This type of propaganda comes from an openly identified source and generally is characterized by gentler methods of persuasion. In other words, white propaganda is correctly attributed to the sponsor, and the source is truthfully identified.

Gray Propaganda

Gray propaganda, on the other hand, is not attributed to the sponsor and conceals the real source of the propaganda. The objective of gray propaganda is to advance viewpoints which are in the interest of the originator but which would be less acceptable to target audiences if the propaganda seemed to be “official”. The reasoning is that avowedly propagandistic materials from a foreign government or identified propaganda agency might convince few, but the same idea presented by seemingly neutral outlets would be more persuasive. An example of gray propaganda would be an article in a newspaper written by a disguised source. Other gray propaganda tactics involves wide dissemination of ideas put forth by others by foreign governments, by national and international media outlets or by private groups, individuals and institutions. Gray propaganda also includes material assistance provided to groups that put forth views deemed useful to the propagandist.

Black Propaganda

Black propaganda also camouflages the sponsor’s participation, but, while gray propaganda is unattributed, black propaganda is falsely attributed. Black propaganda is rebellious and provocative; it is usually designed to appear to have originated from a hostile source in order to cause that source embarrassment, to damage its

prestige, to undermine its credibility or to get it to take actions it would otherwise not take. Black propaganda is usually prepared by secret agents or an intelligence service, because it would be damaging to the originating government if it were discovered. It routinely employs underground newspapers, forged materials and planted gossip or rumours.

An additional category of propaganda might be termed “propaganda of the deed”. This involves actions taken for the psychological effects they will have on various publics. Propaganda of the deed can also include such disparate actions as educational or cultural exchanges, economic aid, disaster relief, disarmament initiatives, international agreements, the appointment of investigating commissions, legislation and other policy initiatives when employed primarily for the effects they will have on public opinion. It is believed that the most prevalent type of propaganda in Nigeria is white propaganda because sources of propaganda in political advertisements are always identified; this is followed by deeds propaganda.

Elements of Propaganda

Peterson (2013) lists the following as some of the key elements of propaganda: The big lie, bandwagon, character assassination, card stacking, information control, glittering generalization, name calling, plain folk, testimonies, stereotypes, symbols, heroes versus villains, pseudo-science, yes sets, endorphin bombing, snob appeal, appeal to prejudice and beautiful people.

Media Ownership Patterns in Nigeria

The ownership of the mass media namely; the print, electronic and the new media in Nigeria according to Okwuchukwu (2014) have different historical origins. An assessment of the existing ownership pattern reveals that while some media organizations are public or government owned, others are financed, owned and operated by private individuals. Okwuchukwu (2014) further observes that:

What is interesting however for some inexplicable reasons is that in some instances the ownership of some media outfits in Nigeria is shrouded in secrecy. Frankly speaking, media ownership in Nigeria is not diaphanous in most cases, this is because most precise ownership of some media organizations are not always known to the public and in many cases, the professional journalists serving as directors of such media companies are seen as fronts for unknown investors. Under the National Broadcasting Commission Act, religious bodies and political parties are specifically precluded from owning broadcast media. Foreign ownership of broadcast media is also restricted,

resulting in very little foreign investment in the Nigeria media.

While ownership of both the print and the electronic media may have some level of organized pattern, ownership of the new media has indeed posed confusion to the media industry in Nigeria as any who has access to the internet has become an emergency media owner, with unrestrained liberty to take anything to the public sphere. The organized media ownership has also been thrown into the hands of politicians who control and detect modus operandi especially during

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the propaganda model, which explains how propaganda and systemic biases function in mass media. First introduced in 1988 by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, the model seeks to explain how populations are manipulated and how consent for economic, social and political policies is manufactured in the public mind due to this propaganda (Mullen &Klaehn, 2010). The theory posits that the way in which news is structured through advertising, concentration of media ownership, government sourcing and others, creates an inherent conflict of interest which acts as propaganda for undemocratic forces.

The propaganda model views the private media as businesses interested more in the sale of a product—readers and audiences—to other businesses (advertisers) rather than on the quality of news to the public. The theory postulates five general classes of filters that determine the type of news that is presented in news media. These five classes are: ownership of the medium, medium's funding sources, sourcing, flak, anti-communism and fear ideology. As Herman himself suggests, it would be necessary to think that the propaganda model can help activists understand where they might best deploy their efforts to influence mainstream media coverage of issues (Enoch, 2014). The relevance of the propaganda model to this study is in the fact that political campaign advertisement, which is at the core of this work, is essentially designed to persuade voters.

Methodology

To realize this goal, the study made use of the analytical research approach known as Content Analysis. In communication research, content analysis is considered a formal system which is systematic and objective for extracting all forms of communication contents. According to Berelson (1952) cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2003), this research technique is suitable for objective and systematic description of manifest content of communication. As noted by Akpan (1990), the use the content analysis technique guarantees objective (distinctions in category), systematic (devoid of influence) and quantitative study of variables in a research.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data collected in the course of the study were presented in tabular form indicating frequency and percentages score. Since the three publications selected for this study were analysed separately, a comparative analysis was done.

Distribution of sources of political advertisements

Newspapers	PDP	APC	Total	Percentage
<i>The Punch</i>	40	19	59	50.9
<i>The Nation</i>	3	36	39	33.6
<i>Nigerian Pilot</i>	18	0	18	15.5
Total	61	55	116	100

Source: Field work 2016

Discussion of findings

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between ownership influence and the publication of political electioneering advertisements with propaganda elements?

This question examined the relationship between ownership influence and the publication of presidential campaign advertisements with propaganda elements in the 2015 electioneering in *The Punch*, *The Nation* and *Nigerian Pilot* newspapers. The Table above shows that *The Punch* newspaper published 40 (67.8%) advertisements containing propaganda elements in favour of PDP, 19 (32.2%) in favour of APC. The *Nation* newspaper, as indicated in the Table published 39 propaganda elements; out of these, three (3) (7.7%) were in favour of PDP and 36 (92.3%) in favour of APC. The Table further revealed that the *Nigerian Pilot* devoted its entire 18 (100%) propaganda elements to PDP. The distribution shows great imbalance and obvious ownership influence in the use of propaganda elements. It could be recalled that this study had from the outset reported a general belief that most Nigerian newspapers were suspected to support certain political candidates or parties during electioneering. Most Nigerian newspapers were allegedly owned by politicians to further their political interests during elections. *The Nation* newspaper, said to be owned by Asiwaju Ahmed Bola Tinubu, a former governor of Lagos state and a chieftain of APC was speculated to have completely favoured APC during the electioneering. From what was revealed by the findings, this paper devoted only three (3) (7.7%) propaganda elements in favour of PDP. Interestingly, none, reflected any negative element against APC.

The few political advertisements sighted in *The Nation* which were in favour of PDP, were basically used to advertise or invite PDP supporters to locations of campaigns. The remaining 36 (92.3%) were entirely devoted to APC and reflected heavily the use of very negative propaganda elements. The *Nation* newspaper, evidently strengthened by its source made generous use of certain negative propaganda elements such as character assassination and pinpointing of enemies. Expressions such as “President Jonathan’s scorecard: Corruption (A+),” “Jonathan must go! Why? he had the power to save lives.....yet he didn’t” (*The Nation*, March 16, 2015); “why did you allow so much blood to be spilled in the North? Why? Why? Why?” (*The Nation*, March 13, 2015), “I vow to do more – Jonathan – Nigerians beware! When Jonathan vows to do more, he means to do more damage” (*Nation*, March 13, 2015), “Do your duty to Nigeria, vote out” – (*Nation*, Feb. 4, 2015), “Meet GEJ’s transformation team who are destroying Nigeria”- (*Nation*, Feb.4, 2015). “Say no to lies about Buhari’s certificate, can we trust those who have continued to lie to us?”.(Feb. 25, 2015). These unguarded uses of negative propaganda in political campaigns could only be traced to obvious ownership influence and regulations.

The *Nigerian Pilot*, believed to be owned by Mr. Dennis Sami and former presidential aide to ex-president Goodluck Jonathan and PDP presidential candidate during the electioneering under study, devoted 18 (100%) to propaganda elements in favour of PDP, in an effort to support the aspiration of the publisher’s political party. This paper made very generous use of propaganda elements such as pinpointing the enemies, and character assassination. It presented its opponent, Gen. Muhamadu Buhari as enemy of the people and grossly incompetent of governing the country. For example, “Remember Fela, he stood up against Buhari, now it’s your turn”-(Jan. 22, 2015), “Rtd. Major General Buhari promised to turn Nigeria to sharia nation, beware of wolf in sheep’s clothing”- (Jan 31, 2015). “Nigerians beware! Be very very afraid, vote Goodluck Jonathan”- (Feb. 23, 2015). “The Bauchi NYSC nine dead paid the supreme price for the ambition of one man- Nigerians think!”- (*Nigerian Pilot*, February 13, 2015), among others.

Despite its claim of strict political neutrality and independence from ownership influence, *The Punch* newspaper directly made very generous use of negative propaganda elements. The difference from others however was in its ability to work with both political parties depending on the level of patronage. *The Punch* newspaper, in utter disregard for its social responsibility however claimed to have operated under cover by allowing advertisers to sign indemnity forms, to make such clients liable for whatever legal case may be instituted against such article by the opponent.

Evidence of generous use of propaganda elements by *The Punch* can be seen in the following “Insurgent confidant? Boko Haram wants talk.....pick Buhari as mediator”, (*Punch* Nov. 2, 2012), “We express our strong belief in General Muhamadu Buhari-MEND Leadership”-(Jan. 7, 2015). “Buhari faults crackdown on Boko Haram”(Punch 3, 2013); “Nigerians Beware!” (*Punch* 25 January, 2015); “Nigerian generals (career coupists) vs a young democracy. Let’s vote a true democrat”- (Feb. 18, p. 24), “Why does APC want 20 million voters disenfranchised? Nigerians be wise! Vote for fairness”-(Feb. 13 2015). “Buhari humiliated Awolowo and then picked his in-law as a spare tyre, Nigerians don’t be fooled, vote Goodluck Ebele Jonathan”-(Jan. 28, 2015, p 29). “your mandate, your vote, your voices, ask yourself do I want more years of Boko Haram or change, more years of corruption or change, more years of declining naira exchange or change, more years of economic decline or change”- (Jan. 28, 2015). “Jonathan score card: corruption (A+), when a barrel of oil sold for a \$100 the President Jonathan led administration was unable to do anything for Nigerians, now that a barrel of oil sells for less than \$50 can we expect anything better? Nigerians it’s in your hands,” (Punch Jan 16, p.47).

From *The Nation* and *Nigerian Pilot*, it is logical to conclude that there is a serious relationship between ownership influence and publication of propaganda elements in political advertisement. The terms used in referring to opponents by papers believed to be owned by or in support of certain political parties, reflect disregard for both ethics of journalism and source credibility theory of journalism practice. For financial gains, and in disregard for the Source Credibility Theory of media practice, *The Punch* newspaper staked its hard earned reputation of a trusted news source and one of the most widely read newspapers in the country, and dabbled in accepting very negative and questionable political advertisements with great potentials of hitting up the polity. The *Nation* and *Nigerian Pilot* newspapers completely threw caution to the trash and made themselves instruments of warfare in the political scenes. By these acts, the three national dailies completely ignored tenets of the Social Responsibility Theory that the media can meet their obligations by setting high standards of professionalism, truth, accuracy and objectivity; and be self-regulating within the framework of the law to avoid disseminating materials that might lead to crime, violence or civil disorder or that might offend minority groups.

The Propaganda Model also came to play in this study. This theory posits that the way in which news is structured through advertising, reflects concentration of media ownership, government sourcing and therefore creates an inherent conflict of interest which acts as propaganda for undemocratic forces. The propaganda model views the private media as businesses interested in the sale of a product—

readers and audiences—to other businesses (advertisers) rather than that of quality news to the public.

Research Question 2: How frequent was the use of propaganda elements in political advertisements?

As findings show, political advertisements especially as it concerned the 2015 presidential electioneering did not go without propaganda, and mostly negative ones. Virtually all the 15 propaganda elements selected for this study were identified in various advertisements and advertorials published in the select national dailies. Of the 140 occurrences across the 116 ad copies examined, *The Punch* newspaper as shown in the Table contributed 73(52%), while *The Nation* contributed 48(34%) and 19(14%) came from the *Nigerian Pilot* newspaper. From the study, it could be said that none of the newspapers under consideration used any political advertisement which did not contain propaganda elements.

Research Question 3: Which propaganda elements were most commonly used during the presidential campaign advertisements?

Findings revealed that most of the political advertisements were greatly dominated by character assassination. Of the 15 propaganda elements selected for the study and of the 140 occurrences recorded, character assassination recorded 21%, having occurred 30 times in the national dailies during the period under consideration. In this category were expressions such as: “the Goodluck Jonathan’s administration has bankrupt Nigeria” (*The Punch*, Feb.72015), “Can we trust this man to be president? Vote Goodluck Jonathan!” (*The Punch*, Feb.1, 2015). *The crack team, show me your friend and I will tell you who you are!*” (*Pilot*, Jan. 25, 2015), “Buhari promises to turn Nigeria to sharia nation, beware of wolf in sheep’s clothing”- (*Pilot* Jan 31, 2019). “*President Jonathan, why did you allow so much blood to be spilled in the north, why? Why? Why?*” (*Nation*, March 13, 2015).

Conclusion

From the findings, the study concludes that the Nigerian mass media organisations are under the control and influences of politicians. What was published and circulated by some national newspapers were clear manifestation of overbearing ownership influence which, if unchecked, was capable of plunging the country into an orgy of violence and anarchy. This development signals a grave danger for the nation’s democracy and security.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it is therefore recommended that:

- (i) The mass media institutions should rise above overbearing ownership influence and keep the tenets of the social responsibility theory at the front

burner of their practice by setting high standards of professionalism, truthfulness, accuracy and objectivity.

- (ii) Political neutrality is recommended for media professionals
- (iii) Political parties should make policies and regulations that would enable politicians to base their campaigns on issues, and use the opportunity to present their manifestos to members of the public than attack the personality of opponents.
- (iv) Media professionals should withdraw services from publishers insisting on the use of negative propaganda elements. By so doing the media would in subsequent campaigns work to redeem the nation from the shackles of hatred so as to save and sustain the nation's democracy.

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