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Audience Demographics and Responses to Political Billboard Advertising Messages in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined audience demographics and responses to political billboard advertising messages in Nigeria, with a focus on understanding how different population segments perceive, interpret, and react to outdoor political campaigns. Political billboards remain a prominent medium for communicating candidates' messages, policy positions, and electoral promises, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas where visibility is high. The study looks at how billboard message affects political knowledge, opinion formation, and involvement in connection to demographic parameters including age, gender, education level, profession, and socioeconomic position. In order to investigate advertising, political billboards, advertising messages, and demographic communications, this research conducted a systematic review of the literature, analyzed the messaging techniques used, and conducted interviews with campaign organizers. Findings revealed that younger, more educated and urban audiences tend to engage more critically with billboard content, whereas older and less-educated populations often rely on simplified visual cues and slogans for political interpretation. Message clarity, visual appeal, location, and cultural relevance significantly affect audience response and recall. The study contributes to political communication by highlighting the interplay between demographic characteristics and outdoor political advertising effectiveness, offering practical insights for campaign strategists seeking to design contextually resonant billboard campaigns that maximize voter engagement and message impact in Nigeria. The study recommended that political campaign planners should design billboard messages based on clearly identified demographic groups such as age, gender, education, income level, and geographic location. Tailoring messages to the specific needs, values, and expectations of different audience segments will improve message relevance, comprehension, and response

Keywords: Audience Demography. Political Billboards. Politic. Billboards. Advertising Messages. Nigeria.

Introduction

There are several subfields within marketing communication, including advertising. Political advertising is one of these fields that has gained popularity. Politicians use various advertising firms to provide imaginative messaging aimed at influencing voters' favourable opinions of their parties,

candidates, and platforms. People in a democracy advocate for improved leadership, and political parties demonstrate their capacity to address these demands via advertisements and manifestos, conferences, ward-to-ward rallies, billboards, writings, grants, and publishing interviews, among other means (Tejumaiye, 2008). In order to obtain votes, political advertising mostly appeals to voters' emotions and logic rather than purchasing votes. In contrast to commercial product advertising, political advertising does not require voters to purchase candidates; instead, voters must cast their ballots in order to win the election. However, only eligible voters within the constituency can do this, as political advertising only targets those who meet the eligibility requirements.

In general, advertising involves telling people about something's existence in order to raise awareness of it; it involves providing notice in order to do so. Advertising is distinct and exceptional, and it is necessary if anything is to be known about the existence of a product, commodity, item, good, service, or political candidate. Any kind of communication with the primary goal of encouraging the purchase and use of products and services is referred to as advertising. As a purposeful form of communication, advertising is both an act and an art. People, organisations, and the government all try to inform the public about their commodities, services, or products. Notably, influencing customer behaviour with regard to a favourable attitude toward promoted goods and services is the intended outcome of advertising of any form. Sponsors often pay for advertising messages to be seen via a variety of conventional media, such as mass media like newspapers, magazines, radio, television, outdoor or direct mail, or new media like websites and text messaging.

One of the most effective forms of communication is advertising. It is a quick way to raise awareness, draw attention, get acceptance, and receive public validation in today's environment. In Nigeria, the advertising paradigm of outdoor billboards has advanced significantly and acquired momentum before independence (Ogunlade, 2011). From those early days and still relevant in today political communication, 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.

However, billboards are media for political campaign advertising. These have become veritable tools for information dissemination by modern-day politicians. Major inter-city, inter-state roads, city streets, and public places are adorned with billboards and posters. In recent years, this form of politicking has taken on a larger and more important role in Nigerian political campaigns. It is fair to say that billboard and campaign posters advertising in Nigerian got elections has sky rocked. That is to say that campaign posters and billboards are used worldwide for various causes ranging from political to socio-economic issues. During the campaign, political parties present their

candidates and arguments in an effort to win over voters. 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.

Notably, it is the duty of the media, particularly billboards, to report on political campaigns and convey such messages to their viewers. The goal of political campaign messaging, according to Geske (2009), referenced in Aduradola and Chris (2023), is to persuade and elicit a reaction from their viewers in order to effect the desired political change. This likely explains why, since Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 after years of military control, there has been a growing preference for political campaign communication in the media. The mobilisation of the voters for political support, which was formerly characterised by personal contact and rallies, has decreased due to the usage of the mass media (Obot, 2023).

Voters respond to political campaign messaging by endorsing or approving one candidate while rejecting another. The majority of political campaigns rely on the positive audience reaction of voters on election day, when the real victors of electoral contests are announced, even if response might take the shape of opinion surveys before to elections. It seems sense that maximising responses on election day is the goal of the electioneering campaign (Kevin, 2021). This research focuses on how social demographic factors affect voters' decisions to support, oppose, or not vote for a candidate on election day.

Individuals may have a similar comprehension of what is being given, but their reactions to it—acceptance or rejection—may vary. In a similar vein, more recent research has shown that audience reactions to media material may vary greatly. This implies that audience reactions to political campaign communications may be influenced by individual circumstances. While some research, such as Powell's (2022) study, examines the impact of political campaign messaging on voter participation, there doesn't seem to be any that focus on specific elements, such as sociodemographic variables, as drivers of reaction to political campaign messages.

According to Livingstone, Couvering, and Thumim (2020), demographic factors including age, gender, finances, and socioeconomic level might influence media access, which is a construct of media literacy in this research. Notably, broadcast media content is influenced by factors including age, gender, location, financial level, habits, ethnicity, and hobbies. In a similar vein, 75% of Nigerians live in rural areas, and 80% of them are not covered by the media, according to Eloho (2017). This implies that even when the media reaches rural regions, there is seldom any opportunity for rural residents to provide comment, and as a result, the opinions of the great majority of people are not reflected. Interestingly, turnout is greater in rural than urban regions since the impoverished majority are more inclined to vote than the affluent or middle class, according to Semetko (2020).

Thus, political affiliation, age, ethnicity, and the recipient's gender all affect how the audience reacts to media messages (Balogun & Olapegba, 2017). This explains why there could be several interpretations and a range of audience reactions. As a result, sociodemographic factors may indicate varying perspectives in how the messages are interpreted. Additionally, age and sex have a substantial impact on voting conduct, according to Balogun and Olapegba's (2017) research on the

psycho-demographic effects on voting behaviour. Additionally, Gaines and Macmillan (2020) found that voting patterns were influenced by sex and education.

However, Gaines and Macmillan's (2020) research found no correlation between voting behaviour and age, ethnicity, social class, self-esteem, and media. These results demonstrate that people do not only react to messages; rather, a number of variables affect the electorate's decision to vote in each given election. Their social standing, gender, age, ethnicity, profession, experience, and beliefs, among other factors, all have an impact on them.

Be that as it may, audience demographics play a crucial role in shaping the content, language, symbols, and overall messaging of political billboard advertisements in Nigeria. Given the country's ethnic diversity, religious plurality, uneven literacy levels, and wide socio-economic differences, political advertisers carefully design billboard messages to resonate with specific demographic groups within particular locations. Thus, political billboard advertising messages are carefully crafted based on audience demographics to maximize effectiveness. That is to say that, by aligning message content and visual elements with the demographic characteristics of target audiences, political advertisers improve message clarity, emotional appeal, and persuasive power. This demographic-based approach ensures that political billboards communicate relevant political narratives that resonate with diverse voter groups. Hence the study, audience demographics and response to political billboard advertising messages in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Political billboard advertising remains one of the most visible and widely used campaign communication tools in Nigeria, particularly during election periods. Political actors invest significant financial and strategic resources in billboard campaigns with the expectation that such messages will influence voter awareness, perception, and ultimately political support. However, despite the widespread use of political billboards across the country, there is growing concern about the uneven and unpredictable nature of audience responses to these messages.

Nigeria is characterized by diverse audience demographics, including variations in age, education, ethnicity, religion, gender, and socio-economic status. These demographic differences significantly shape how political messages are interpreted, accepted, or rejected. While some demographic groups may respond positively to billboard messages through increased political awareness and favorable perceptions, others may display skepticism, apathy, or outright rejection due to cultural mismatch, low message relevance, or historical distrust in political communication. This variation raises questions about the actual effectiveness of political billboard advertising across different demographic segments.

Regardless of the central role of audience demographics in communication effectiveness, many political billboard messages in Nigeria appear to be designed using generalized or uniform approaches, with limited consideration for the specific demographic characteristics of targeted audiences. As a result, messages may fail to resonate with intended voters, leading to misinterpretation, indifference, or negative reactions. This disconnect undermines the persuasive intent of political billboard advertising and reduces its potential contribution to informed political participation.

The inadequate knowledge of how audience demographics affect reactions to political billboard advertising messages in Nigeria is hence the issue this research attempts to solve. That is to say that without such understanding, political communicators may continue to deploy ineffective billboard campaigns that do not align with the diverse social realities of Nigerian voters, thereby weakening political communication effectiveness and democratic engagement

Research Objectives

The following objectives of the research were to:

- assess the degree of exposure of different demographic groups to political billboard advertising messages during election campaigns in Nigeria;
- examine audience demographic variables that shape responses to political billboard advertising messages in Nigeria;
- ascertain the effectiveness of demographic-targeted political billboard advertising messages in influencing voter awareness and political attitudes in Nigeria.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research questions.

- What is the exposure levels of different demographic groups to political billboard advertising messages during election campaigns in Nigeria?
- What audience demographic variables that shape responses to political billboard advertising messages in Nigeria?
- What is the effectiveness of demographic-targeted political billboard advertising messages in influencing voter awareness and political attitudes in Nigeria?

Literature Review

Advertising

According to Kotler (2007, p. 34), advertising is defined as non-personal forms of communication carried out via paid media under obvious sponsorship. When the aforementioned description is broken down and its elements examined, it becomes clear that advertising is non-personal since it targets groups of people rather than individuals. These groupings might be business entities or individual customers. Sponsors fund the majority of advertising.

Advertising, a type of commercial mass communication intended to promote the sale of a good or service, or a message on behalf of a company or organization, has grown to be a very powerful tool in today's society, especially because of its ability to sway consumers' decisions about which of the available products to buy. It is now a typical commercial marketing tactic. It is practiced in both developed and developing nations. Fletcher (2003) said that "advertising impinges upon all our lives hundred and often thousands of times each day in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, in posters, on billboard and buses" due to the aforementioned cause. According to

Richards and Curran (2002), advertising is a paid, mediated form of communication from a recognisable source that is intended to influence the recipient to behave either now or in the future. Belch & Belch (2003, p. 131) provide an official and widely accepted definition of advertising as any paid non-personal communication about a company, product, service, or concept by a designated sponsor.

However, Kotler (2006, p. 54) asserts that advertising may be an affordable means of spreading messages, whether for the purpose of educating people or developing a brand image. Convenience, economy, health, sensory benefits, quality, performance, comfort, dependability, durability, efficiency, and efficacy are just a few of the many logical reasons that can serve as the basis for advertising appeals, according to Duncan (2002, p. 21).

Billboard Advertising

In Nigeria, especially in Nasarawa state, this is one of the most widely used platforms for political campaigns during the general elections of 2023. Outdoor media includes billboards. The intended audience for billboards is often pedestrians, cars, and people in moving vehicles. They are distinguished by visually appealing models and attention-grabbing phrases.

A billboard is most often defined as an outdoor sign or poster that is typically seen on streets, roads, and motorways. Outdoor advertising is another name for a billboard, which is an outdoor sign or poster. Large signs placed beside roads to promote a variety of goods, services, and causes are known as billboard advertising (Geek, 2013).

Large format advertising displays, or billboards, are meant to be seen from a distance of more than fifty feet. Bulletins, junior posters, posters, and spectaculars are just a few examples of billboard displays. Digital billboards, mobile billboards, inflatable billboards, multifunctional billboards, billboard bicycles, mechanical billboards, and dimensional billboards are the main categories of billboards.

The use of roadside signage to promote and advertise a variety of goods and services is referred to as "billboard advertising." According to Rampur (20012, p. 17), Burma Shave, a maker of brushless shaving cream in the 1920s, was the forerunner of contemporary billboard advertising in America. There are a number of false beliefs that the efficacy of billboard advertising has decreased as a result of the introduction of various alternative advertising strategies. The opposite has been shown, however, and this tactic has undoubtedly helped a number of companies worldwide.

He goes on to say that throughout the 20th century, a number of industries and enterprises used billboard advertising to draw customers to a wide variety of products and services due to the enormous rise in automobile use. These ads were employed by a number of towns and cities to entice tourists to stop for a long time and engage in some sightseeing before continuing on. Additionally, billboards were used by roadside restaurants to advertise hot meals at affordable prices. Their success led to the creation of an entirely new segment of the advertising sector. Customers needed more modern and eye-catching ads that would entice them to stop and pay for potential services and products.

These days, billboards come in a variety of forms. Painted boards, sometimes called painted bulletins, are coated in weather-resistant outside paint. Certain outdoor paints are designed specifically to resist fading. Usually just for a few months, advertising on these kinds of billboards is seen as beneficial. Despite the unique paint, these billboards often fade and lose their charm.

Impact of billboard in Political Advertising

Political advertising is a kind of commercial communication used to persuade voters to support a party's candidate. In contemporary politics, political parties market their candidates to voters in return for their support. All types of advertising aimed at garnering support for any and all political campaigns, including ballot initiatives, political action, and individuals seeking public office, are included in the category of political advertising. Additionally, political politicians utilise it as a campaign strategy to connect with and sway people. It may take place over many months during a political campaign and include a variety of media.

Political advertising, according to Olujide, Adeyemi, and Gbandeyan (2010), is when political candidates utilise the media to reach a wider audience. They note that direct appearances on the campaign trail, which were common among politicians over the previous fifty years, have been replaced by the widespread use of radio and television. They claim that the most popular strategy is spot advertising, which aims to provide a positive picture of the candidate.

Asemah (2011) states that billboards "are not to beautify the towns, but to attract attention to products and services" (p. 80). In Nigeria, billboard advertising has been more widespread and significant in relation to political campaigns in recent years. The usage of billboard advertising during electioneering campaigns is growing, despite the nation's awareness, growth, and embrace of electronic media. In addition to creating advertising agencies that focus solely on billboard advertising, this development has led to the formation of a robust association of billboard advertising agencies in Nigeria, which is acknowledged by advertisers as a division of the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) (Bardi, 2010). The rise in billboard advertising demonstrates how successful billboards are in promoting projects (Ajo, 2006).

In contrast to other outdoor advertising tactics, billboards guarantee the advertisement will be seen often and again. Additionally, Wroblewski (2018) asserts that billboards are often situated in areas with a large volume of automobile and pedestrian traffic; as a result, users of these locations are frequently exposed to advertisements on the board; second, billboards provide a great degree of locational flexibility. To put it another way, the boards may be positioned where the marketer really wanted. Furthermore, according to Wroblewski (2018), billboards are less expensive per thousand than the majority of other media. They are often more economical, particularly for advertising on a tight budget. In addition to having excellent colour reproduction, billboards are a powerful reminder tool that often acts as a trigger for impulsive purchases.

Due in large part to politicians' and their political parties' awareness of the effectiveness and perceived value of the tool to inform and inform the electorate about what they plan to offer when elected to office, political advertising has recently gained recognition in Nigeria (Ojekwe, 2016). According to Ojekwe (2016), citing Olujide (2010), advertising is now seen as a Thoughts on Political Communication in Nigeria true weapon or channel to promote a candidate and de-market

the opponent (as the case may be). In other words, political parties and politicians may now utilise political advertising to project a positive or liked picture of themselves while simultaneously projecting a bad image of the opposition.

Researchers like Ezegwu & Mbonu (2013) and Ezegwu, Ezeji & Agbasimelo (2015) have produced findings about the value of billboards in political advertising and raising awareness. According to earlier research, billboards are a helpful technique used by politicians or candidates to introduce themselves to voters. Others, like Ata-Awaji and Momoh (2020), discovered that political advertising had minimal influence on elections. However, the use of billboards for political advertising was not excluded in Nigeria's 2023 general elections, with candidates and political parties erecting a number of them along important thoroughfares and in key sites around the country's cities and towns.

Advertising Media and Effectiveness of Advertising Messages

Tjiptono and Septianto (2019, p. 190) define advertising as the presentation and promotion of concepts about a product or service, including posters, brochures, internet, print, and electronic media advertising. Kotler and Keller (2016, p. 607) assert that advertising may be an economical means of disseminating information, either to educate consumers or to develop brand preferences. Effective advertising may provide benefits even in the difficult climate of today. Morison (2015, p. 17) described advertising as a kind of impersonal communication about a concept, product, service, or organization that is funded by a single, well-known sponsor. The term "non-personal" refers to advertisements that use mass media (TV, radio, magazines, newspapers) that may simultaneously reach a huge number of people or groups. Because of its extensive reach, advertising is the most well-known and often debated kind of promotion, according to Morison (2015, p. 18). Morison (2015, p. 19) asserts that different companies have different advertising objectives. A business uses advertising to obtain a quick reaction or action. However, some businesses could want to raise awareness or create a favourable long-term relationship.

Advertising media are channels that advertisers use to reach their target audience with their messaging (Udom & Nnewuihe, 2012). Every advertisement reaches the target audience via a media that is often funded by the sponsor. These media of marketing communication according to Nwabueze (2006, pp. 169 – 170) are categorized thus:

- a) The mass media – radio, television, film (broadcast media) newspaper, and magazines (print media).
- b) Outdoor media: billboard, posters, transit media, spectacles.
- c) Below-the-line specialty media: key holders, openers, wrist watches, t-shirts and polo-shirts, towels, etc.
- d) Indigenous media: market squares, churches, symbols, membranophones, idiophones, etc.

The choice of any medium of advertising depends on who the advertiser targets and what they are seeking to promote. To reach a particular audience with their intended message, many organisations use a range of media services. "Effective messages are essential for successful advertising, but these

messages are of little use unless advertising media effectively reach the intended target audience," according to Shimp (2000, p. 369). This implies that advertising cannot be effective without an appropriate choice of an appropriate advertising medium. Again, the choice of an appropriate advertising can make or mar the advertising effort of a corporate organization. One cannot measure the effectiveness of an advertising message without taking into account the medium that carries the message. Thus, advertising message and advertising media serve as a vital connection between a corporation that produces a something or service and the customer who may want to buy it.

The effectiveness of every advertising strategy largely depends on the careful selection of appropriate advertising media suitable for its audience. A careful selection of the appropriate media means 90 percent achievement in the advertising campaign.

The various forms of advertising "provide avenues for advertisers to send their messages to well defined homogeneous groups, which improves effectiveness and reduces waste in communication spending," according to Fill (2006, p. 555). What this means is that without good research which reveals the best medium to promote a given product, the whole money spent in preparing the message and placing in on a medium could amount to a colossal waste. Advertising cannot be said to be effective or successful unless it reaches the intended consumers or prospect and elicits the desired response from them. As noted previously by Fill (2006, p. 554), "the array of media is continually growing, all of which have strengths and weaknesses that impact on the quality, effectiveness, and meaning attributed to the message by the audience." This means that not every medium is appropriate for every product and every audience; and that a poor choice of advertising medium or media can undermine the advertising goals of the advertisers.

The following are some of media utilized in advertising campaigns:

- I. **Broadcast Advertising Media:** TV and radio are among the most popular media of advertising across the world. Many people spend most of their time listening to radio or watching television. Thus, the electronic media help advertisers reach a very significant number of audience and give advertising products and services prominence. These media provide opportunity for creativity and convey marketing message effectively through sight, sound, and motion.
- II. **Radio as an Advertising Medium:** Radio commercials travel through the air as radio waves from the transmitter to the antenna and, ultimately, to a reception device (radio set). Radio is ubiquitous, (that is radio is everywhere). Almost every home in Nigeria and other parts of the globe have at least one radio set, cars have radio, phones, even cable televisions can be used to listen to radio. According to Mustafa and Al-Abdallah (2020), radio advertising campaigns may assist listeners in learning, making decisions about what to buy, or even going shopping with influential peers. According to Lankford (2018), radio commercials include more sales information; as a result, customers may make more purchases based on the advertisement's depiction of organisational health and competitive dynamics. Warmth, passion, pleasure, and desire are just a few of the feelings that may be triggered by different radio commercials. According to Mustafa and Al-Abdallah (2020), experiential and utilitarian commodities are more preferred due to the scarcity of radio commercials and motivating appeals for programs. For a campaign that targets the whole

country or religion (mass audience campaigns), radio could be a great choice. However, for a message that targets some class of audience like the elite, the youths, etc., using radio only might amount to a waste of resources. Most young people from age 25 down hardly listen to radio. About 60 percent of people that use smartphones which have radio, do not use their smartphones to listen to radio. Radio lacks the color, the glamour, the razzmatazz that television and the new media have. This is a huge limitation.

- III. **Television as an Advertising Medium:** Television serves as an audience distribution mechanism, and advertisers see television ads as an important part of the television business and a major source of revenue. (Hada, Shrestha, & Shaikh, 2019). For long years, television has been recognised as the glamour-advertising medium (Mustafa & Al-Abdallah, 2020). Because there is an established audience base for many television programs, media managers strive to find the ideal balance between the target demographic and the viewers' perspective of television shows. Television has a greater reach and exposure than other media because of its high frequency loudness, which makes it easy to reach millions of people with a single, inexpensive commercial. According to Mustafa and Al-Abdallah (2020), television is seen to be the most popular medium for promoting products and services that cannot be advertised in a different way on radio or print media. Customers, voters, or viewers are more likely to remember items sold on television than via other conventional media, and they are also more susceptible to persuasion. Increased engagement with the display increases the likelihood that consumers would remember the ad throughout the program, according to an investigation of consumer television watching connected to actual retail purchases (Tarik & Adnan, 2018). According to Shafiq, Haque, Abdullah, and Jan (2017), television is a contact medium that is distinguished by its segmentation potential. Depending on the consumer's preferences, it may target the specific display or the precise broadcasting network. Television commercials have been connected to consumer purchasing choices in earlier research (Mustafa & Al-Abdallah, 2020). People are more likely to listen to the radio in the mornings and afternoons since they are often travelling to and from work in private or public transportation. They are less focused on their job during such hours and will listen to the radio (Saleh, 2017).
- IV. **Print Advertising Media:** These are media that use printed information to reach audience with promotional messages about products and services. They include:
- V. **The Newspaper:** Newspapers are used to reach literate customers or prospects. They can be used to advertise both consumer and industrial goods. They could be dailies, weeklies, etc. Newspaper is a viable advertising medium. But its audience is limited. These limitations are both demographic and psychographic. For example, it is not for illiterate people, again those in rural areas, especially in the creeks in South-South Nigeria do not have access to newspaper. Newspaper Advertisement For many years, newspapers have been one of the most popular forms of communication. According to Mogaji et al. (2018), print media—of which newspapers are the most important—contribute significantly to the expansion of other media. According to Tao (2020), newspaper ads include the most information and are thought to be very informative when compared to other media, such as television. According to Mustafa and Al-Abdallah (2020), marketers may easily show their ads with

more information, facts, and images in their preferred target newspaper. The affluent readership benefits greatly from newspapers. In order to reach a wide range of demographic groups and provide them with news, entertainment, and advertisements, it is also disseminated on a daily (or sometimes) basis with opinion makers, particularly adults (Saleh, 2017). Previous studies have shown a significant correlation between newspaper ads and customer purchasing choices (Ingavale, 2013; Mustafa & Al-Abdallah, 2020).

- VI. **The Magazine as an Advertising Medium:** The magazine is an elitist medium. Therefore, is used to target the elite, those at the high social stratum.
- VII. **New Media Advertising:** The new media present limitless possibilities in the communication world. Little wonder most corporate organizations today are allocating significant advertising budget to online advertising. The new media have the glamour, colour, sight, sound, the razzmatazz, the vibes, the swag, etc. They are interactive, fast, quick, can reach millions within a very short period. Most people today, especially young people spend hours every day on the Internet, and within this time contextual advertising messages can reach them and this might influence their buying intention or decision. Due to the fact that consumers spend more time on social media than on other media, social media advertising is now popular. The ordinary customer now has access to worldwide product and service information because to social media and Internet technology. These days, buyers just enter the kind of thing they want into their internet search engine and swiftly decide based on factors like price sensitivity, product quality, price-value ratio, user reviews, etc. Based on what a user is doing online, related advertisements usually pop up (contextual advertising) wooing the user to try out the advertised product or service. Online advertising, many have argued, is the future of advertising

Demographic Variables and Audience Response To Political Campaign Messages

According to Livingstone, Couvering, and Thumim (2020), demographic factors including age, gender, finances, and socioeconomic level might influence media access, which is a construct of media literacy in this research. Notably, broadcast media content is influenced by factors including age, gender, location, financial level, habits, ethnicity, and hobbies. In a similar vein, 75% of Nigerians live in rural areas, and 80% of them are not covered by the media, according to Eloho (2017). This implies that even when the media reaches rural regions, there is seldom any opportunity for rural residents to provide comment, and as a result, the opinions of the great majority of people are not reflected. Interestingly, turnout is greater in rural than urban regions since the impoverished majority are more inclined to vote than the affluent or middle class, according to Semetko (2020).

Thus, political affiliation, age, ethnicity, and the recipient's gender all affect how the audience reacts to media messages (Balogun & Olapegba, 2017). This explains why there could be several interpretations and a range of audience reactions. As a result, sociodemographic factors may indicate varying perspectives in how the messages are interpreted. Additionally, age and sex have a substantial impact on voting conduct, according to Balogun and Olapegba's (2017) research on the psycho-demographic effects on voting behaviour. Additionally, Gaines and Macmillan (2020) found that voting patterns were influenced by sex and education.

However, Gaines and Macmillan's (2020) research found no correlation between voting behaviour and age, ethnicity, social class, self-esteem, and media. These results demonstrate that people do not only react to messages; rather, a number of variables affect the electorate's decision to vote in each given election. Their social standing, gender, age, ethnicity, profession, experience, and beliefs, among other factors, all have an impact on them.

Theoretical framework

Reception theory

In a 1973 article titled "Encoding/Decoding in the Television Discourse," British sociologist and cultural studies expert Stuart Hall established reception theory, sometimes known as reception analysis. Hall put out a novel philosophy of mass communication that emphasised the need of the audience actively interpreting media messages. To put it simply, the idea assumes that audiences are different and have the ability to actively participate in message decoding. According to his idea, viewers of television and other media are exposed to messages that are decoded, or perceived, in different ways based on a person's social circumstances, gender, age, profession, cultural background, economic status, and individual experiences. Livingstone's (2024) assertion that audience reaction is varied is consistent with this evidence of a link between audience response and audience demographic factors. This viewpoint reflects a shift in academics' focus from the media to media consumers. It runs counter to ideas that dehumanise viewers, including the hegemonic theory and the magic bullet hypothesis, which contend that the media may directly influence a person's actions. The reception hypothesis holds that the media's message is negotiated by the audience.

Three types of audience reaction were classified by Hall. One is the prevailing reading, which implies that the audience accepts the dominant values found in the message's favoured interpretation. The second is the negotiated reading, in which the audience may disagree with certain parts based on their social background but typically agrees with the main values in the favoured reading. The third is the oppositional reading, which implies that the audience disapproves of the prevailing ideals articulated in the message's favoured interpretation. Additionally, the audience's opposition indicates agreement with Livingstone (2024). This theory's acknowledgement of the connection between sociodemographic factors and audience reaction to communications also makes it helpful for this research, which aims to determine how much the theory affects audience reaction during political campaign communication.

The Social Judgment Theory

In 1961, Carl Hovland, Caroline Sheriff, and Muzafer Sheriff proposed the social judgement hypothesis. According to the idea, people's interpretations of communications vary depending on their attitudes and orientations toward the topics being addressed. It is predicated on the idea that a compelling message's impact on a specific subject, like an election campaign, relies on how the recipient assesses the message's viewpoint (O' Keefe, 1990 quoted in Smith et al., 2006). To put it another way, a message on political posters is either accepted or rejected depending on the electorate's cognitive map and ego involvement, especially if it is within their acceptable range.

According to the social judgement theory (Sheriff & Horland, 1961, in Asemah & Nwammuo, 2017), individuals evaluate or assess the substance of communications depending on their anchoring or attitude on a certain message.

The social judgement hypothesis generally maintains that people have three cognitive departments, which are as follows:

- I. Latitude of acceptance
- II. Latitude of rejection
- III. Latitude of non-commitment

Messages that are often acceptable to a person are included in the latitude of acceptance. Messages that a person deems inappropriate are referred to as the latitude of rejection. The latitude of non-commitment includes messages that people don't care about, so they may accept or reject them.

According to this idea, a political advertising on a poster's likelihood of persuading voters would thus rely on where it sits within the electorate's latitude or cognitive department. Any strategy to create convincing political advertising, based on the social judgement theory, needs electorate analysis to find and comprehend potentialities that decide whether the intended message will be accepted or rejected by the target audience. In conclusion, social judgement theory suggests that before creating an advertisement, political marketers should carefully consider the potential pre-existing attitudes of the audience (electorate) about political posters. Political advertisements will fail in their attempt to persuade voters if their message is inside the electorate's margin of rejection. However, a political marketer is not only influencing the population but also reinforcing their preexisting beliefs provided their message is clearly laid out in the voter's latitude of acceptability. The idea states that a message (advertisement) can only be really persuasive if it is conveyed into a person's latitude of non-commitment or at the boundaries of their latitude of acceptance.

Research Design

In order to investigate advertising, political billboards, advertising messaging, and demographic communications, this research is based on a thorough examination of the literature. In this instance, the approach is based on a comprehensive literature analysis that examines the factors that have contributed to the development of journalistic practice via scholarly papers, books, and internet resources. This approach is thought to be the most suitable for this research in order to fully explore the theoretical concerns about the demographics of the audience and political billboard advertisements. The study synthesises previous research to address its research questions.

Discussion

Q1: What audience demographic variables that shapes responses to political billboard advertising messages in Nigeria?

Political billboard advertising messages are strategically crafted based on audience demographics to enhance relevance, comprehension, and persuasive impact. The design, language, symbols, and topics of billboard advertisements are significantly influenced by audience demographics, including age, gender, education, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic level. Since billboards are brief and highly visual, political advertisers rely on demographic insights to communicate effectively within limited viewing time.

Age demographics significantly influence billboard message content and presentation. Messages targeted at younger audiences often employ vibrant colors, modern typography, concise slogans, and themes related to employment opportunities, education, digital innovation, and social change. In contrast, messages aimed at older voters tend to emphasize leadership experience, political stability, continuity, and proven governance, often using formal language and conservative design elements.

Educational background and literacy levels determine the complexity of billboard messages. For audiences with lower literacy levels, political billboards prioritize visual elements such as candidate photographs, party logos, symbols, and short slogans to convey meaning quickly. For more educated audiences, billboard messages may include issue-based appeals, governance achievements, or policy-oriented statements that align with their informational needs and critical evaluation skills.

Ethnic and cultural demographics strongly shape billboard message design. Political advertisers often incorporate local languages, traditional attire, cultural symbols, and familiar community references to appeal to specific ethnic groups. This localization helps create a sense of shared identity and cultural belonging, increasing the likelihood that audiences will relate to and trust the candidate.

Religious demographics also influence billboard messaging. In religiously homogeneous areas, political billboard messages may subtly reflect dominant religious values such as honesty, peace, justice, and moral leadership. While explicit religious messaging is often avoided to maintain inclusivity, symbolic cues and value-based language are used to resonate with the religious sensibilities of the target audience.

Gender demographics affect the framing of political billboard messages. Messages aimed at women may emphasize healthcare, education, family welfare, and empowerment, while also featuring inclusive imagery that represents female participation. This approach acknowledges women's political influence and encourages greater identification with the campaign.

The emphasis of billboard messaging is significantly influenced by socioeconomic level. In lower-income communities, messages often highlight promises of job creation, poverty alleviation, infrastructure development, and access to basic services. In higher-income or urban areas, billboard messages may focus on economic growth, security, transparency, and efficient governance.

Q2: What is the effectiveness of demographic-targeted political billboard advertising messages in influencing voter awareness in Nigeria?

The choice of any medium of advertising depends on who the advertiser targets and what they are seeking to promote. To reach a particular audience with their intended message, many organisations use a range of media services. "Effective messages are essential for successful advertising, but these messages are of little use unless advertising media effectively reach the intended target audience," according to Shimp (2000, p. 369). This implies that advertising cannot be effective without an appropriate choice of an appropriate advertising medium. Again, the choice of an appropriate advertising can make or mar the advertising effort of a corporate organization. One cannot measure the effectiveness of an advertising message without taking into account the medium that carries the message. Thus, advertising message and advertising media serve as a vital connection between a corporation that produces a something or service and the customer who may want to buy it.

The effectiveness of every advertising strategy largely depends on the careful selection of appropriate advertising media suitable for its audience. A careful selection of the appropriate media means 90 percent achievement in the advertising campaign. The various forms of advertising "provide avenues for advertisers to send their messages to well defined homogeneous groups, which improves effectiveness and reduces waste in communication spending," according to Fill (2006, p. 555). What this means is that without good research which reveals the best medium to promote a given product, the whole money spent in preparing the message and placing in on a medium could amount to a colossal waste. Advertising cannot be said to be effective or successful unless it reaches the intended consumers or prospect and elicits the desired response from them. As previously noted by Fill (2006, p. 554), "the array of media is continually growing, all of which have strengths and weaknesses that impact on the quality, effectiveness, and meaning attributed to the message by the audience."

Therefore, the effectiveness of demographic-targeted political billboards in influencing voter awareness can be measured based on the following factors:

What demographic targeting means: Political campaigns strategically place billboards where specific demographic groups are concentrated (e.g., near universities for youth; marketplaces for women traders).

Increased Visibility: Strategic placement in high-traffic areas increases message reach among target segments.

Improved recall: Demographic-aligned visual cues (e.g., familiar language or local issues) enhance memory retention.

Agenda setting: Repeated exposure to key messages (economic plans, security agendas, anti-corruption stance) boosts issue awareness over time.

Reinforcement (Not Conversion): Billboards often reinforce views rather than radically change political preferences especially among engaged voters.

Complement to other media: When paired with radio, SMS, social media, and door-to-door outreach, billboards help reinforce awareness, especially for less media-connected demographics.

Conclusion

Audience demographics play a decisive role in shaping how political billboard advertising messages are perceived, interpreted, and responded to in Nigeria. The study of audience response reveals that political billboards do not influence voters uniformly; rather, their effectiveness is strongly conditioned by demographic factors such as age, gender, educational attainment, socioeconomic position, ethnicity, religion, location, language, and political consciousness.

Political billboards in Nigeria are more effective in creating awareness and reinforcing existing political attitudes than in directly changing voting behaviour. Their impact is strongest when campaign messages are carefully tailored to the demographic characteristics of the target audience and integrated with other communication channels such as radio, social media, and grassroots mobilization. Therefore, understanding audience demographics is essential for designing political billboard advertising messages that are relevant, inclusive, and capable of generating meaningful voter engagement in Nigeria's diverse political landscape.

Recommendations

Based on the influence of audience demographics on responses to political billboard advertising messages in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of political billboards during election campaigns

1. Political campaign planners should design billboard messages based on clearly identified demographic groups such as age, gender, education, income level, and geographic location. Tailoring messages to the specific needs, values, and expectations of different audience segments will improve message relevance, comprehension, and response
2. Political billboards should not be used in isolation. Campaigns should integrate billboard advertising with radio, social media, town hall meetings, and interpersonal communication to reinforce messages and improve audience understanding across different demographic groups.

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