

VISUAL STRATEGIES IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS: THE CASE OF 2015 ENUGU STATE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Uzoagba, Chukwunonso Okechukwu & Uzoagba, Ogechukwu Miracle
Department of Fine and Applied Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka & Department
of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages, University of Nigeria, Nsukka
chukwunonso.uzoagba@unn.edu.ng; ogechukwu.nnejj@unn.edu.ng

Abstract

Campaigns have become a defining feature of elections around the world, taking various forms. Rallies have caused some noise in our environment. Noise has been managed with the arrival and influence of computers in the fields of graphic design and visual communication. Still, it continues to have a substantial impact on the interactions between candidates and electorates. Basic verbalisations conduct some exchanges, while others demand creative visualisation. Engaging in either of these two modes is informed by the candidate's ability to win the public's hearts while also controlling noise pollution associated with campaign rallies. Beyond verbal approaches, carefully designed manifestos, defined plans, and operational programs are extensively revealed. This reaction lends credence to the adage "a picture is worth a thousand words." This article examined, using descriptive analysis, the creative use of visual and textual elements in the 2015 Enugu State Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) gubernatorial campaign, with a focus on billboards and branded vehicles. It also states that well-articulated graphic imagery, rather than extensive verbalisation, is more effective in creating compelling awareness.

Introduction

Language is supposed to be the way by which similar animals communicate and interact with each other. This communication and contact take various forms. Language is considered to exist when information is sent in a give-and-take manner. Even though one of the characteristics of human language mentioned by Hockett (1960) is the vocal-auditory channel, in which biological organs are manipulated to produce meaningful sounds, signs, and writing are also forms of communication in the manual-visual channels. These indicators can take the shape of visual artworks such as graphics, sculptures, paintings, and ceramics. A piece of each of these forms communicates information to people through the language of art. Art uses its aspects to convey thoughts that a simple spoken announcement cannot describe in the same amount of time or with the same clarity. When textures, lines, shapes, forms, and colours are imaginatively placed in accordance with a specific art principle, they have didactic, informational, and educational qualities. According to Morgan (2014), art design has significant aspects that make it more than merely aesthetic objects; it is also a tool capable of influencing the public to act. This distinguishing property of the visual arts has established it as an essential weapon for adequate sensitisation during political campaigns. To that end, this study examines how to use artistic components to convey results-oriented information to individuals in as few words as possible. The work is structured into sections that cover the introduction, an overview of election campaigns, visuals and prints, identifying and interpreting selected campaign materials, and the conclusion. The main objective of this paper, therefore, is to discuss campaign adverts from the Enugu 2015 gubernatorial election to identify the visual elements that help convince people to have confidence in and trust them. Again, the paper seeks to establish that well-articulated graphic imagery is highly effective in fostering awareness during elections. The study is

descriptive, with data drawn from billboards placed in strategic locations in the state capital and beyond. Apart from billboards, attention was drawn to branded vehicles, which were extensively used to raise verbal awareness among citizens of the state.

The visual framing theory served as the study's theoretical framework. It expands on the larger framing theory first proposed by sociologist Erving Goffman in 1974, positing that people interpret experiences through fundamental frameworks that influence their comprehension and actions. Visual framing investigates how images, photographs, graphics, and other visual elements shape perception, opinion, and behaviour by influencing how information is presented and received. Visual framing employs a range of elements, including composition, colour, symbolism, and style, to evoke specific emotional and cognitive responses. Colours, for example, can elicit particular emotions (red for urgency, blue for relaxation), and composition directs viewers' attention, whilst symbolism embeds cultural connotations that support the desired framing message. Researchers discovered a four-tiered model of visual frames.

Election Campaigns: An Overview

Political campaigns make extensive use of sound, signs, and symbols to communicate. In democracies, the term 'political campaign' typically refers to an election campaign, which is an organised effort to influence decision-making within a given group. According to Popkin (1994), election campaigns are a special type of information campaign aimed at influencing voters' preferences while also providing voters with an opportunity to obtain politically vital information to make a decision. A variety of campaign materials are used to attain this goal. Materials utilised in the Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi gubernatorial campaigns in Enugu State included billboards, posters, banners, stickers, branded cars, and souvenirs. All of these are examples of print and visual media. According to Norris (2003), Farrell and Webb (2000), and Bulck (1993), election posters, despite their traditional origins, are one of the most effective political campaign techniques. Posters and billboards remain essential to every big campaign. According to Plasser (2009), election posters are a typical kind of political advertising in many nations around the world.

A campaign is a series of actions organised by a political party or an office candidate to become acquainted with the electorate and gain their support. It is distinguished by numerous initiatives aimed at ensuring that complete conviction reaches the grassroots. A campaign is seen to be both for and against a candidate for public office. The majority of these campaign activities include rallies, poster posting, handbill and sticker distribution, billboard mounting, and political caucuses and parades. High-decibel levels are used with loudspeakers, horn speakers, generator sets, and, on some occasions, sirens. This equipment is used in a way that generates noise even in quiet locations such as hospitals, schools, and religious centres, where noise should be considered prohibited. The sort of activity occurring in a given region determines the predicted level of noise. It is no surprise that Oyedepo (2013) found that the average ambient noise level in the industrial areas, which should be about 90 dB, is rarely comparable to the 60 dB predicted in schools, hospitals, and residential places. This idea is typically ignored during campaigns in which vehicles, garbage trucks, rock band performances in front of speakers, and emergency sirens emit 90-120 decibels. According to Romanirag (2014), the maximum noise level that human nerve cells can tolerate is 80-90 dB; any higher level can be damaging to the body. This is extremely harmful and can lead to noise annoyance, resentment, discontent, discomfort, and

dissatisfaction, particularly when one's thoughts and feelings are affected (Bhatia, 2014). In support of the foregoing, Kamugunda (nd) claims that the noise generated during campaigns is so loud that people suffer in silence from its repercussions.

Okpoko and Agbo (2016) examined the economic implications of billboards during the 2015 campaign in Enugu and found that large sums of money are typically spent on billboard advertising during campaigns. Again, rather than adding aesthetic value, billboards were seen as repulsive because of their frequent, unguarded placements.

Visuals and Prints: An Adaptive Mechanism

Visuals are typically paired with illustrations, photos, or other visuals used to supplement words or prints and convey vital information during a discussion. They are a potential alternative to spoken communication. These pictures are incorporated into posters, billboards, pamphlets, and handbills to communicate, educate, and influence the general public about specific products, in this case, election campaigns. Prints, on the other hand, are written information on a flat, two-dimensional surface, such as newspapers, magazines, posters, billboards, and fliers, to transmit specific information. Convincing campaign prints and graphics are specifically developed to blend images and words to persuade the teeming electorates to accept the political ideology of a particular candidate or political party, thereby resulting in their votes. In other words, campaign strategies are designed to sell political goals, beliefs, and philosophies to the people of a specific jurisdiction. Because graphics do not involve locutions, the mission statements and ideas underlying the aforementioned advertisement materials have significantly reduced the amount of noise discharged into the atmosphere. According to Wardhaugh (2006), most locutions reflect a speaker's intent, but pictures can also convey meaning substantially without words. Visuals are a valuable technique for controlling noise during campaigns, as the saying goes, "pictures speak louder, clearer, and even more convincingly than words."

Visuals communicate in multiple languages. This implies they go over time, place, and culture. Visual language enables people from different locations to speak with one another. They help people overcome the problems of multilingualism. Visuals serve an objective role. Communication, when not handled appropriately, can cause noise, which has become a key feature of Nigerian campaigns today. Furthermore, the use of billboards, posters, pamphlets, and branded cars has had a significant impact on the organisation of demonstrations to reach voters. The employment of prints and images provides a greater coverage. Posters and fliers are handed randomly to people, acting as a one-on-one campaign technique. This resource contains the knowledge required to be convinced of any political party or aspirant. According to Lincoln (1976:302), "...posters represent a very cost-effective campaign tool with their impact stemming from accessibility, inescapability, relative permanence, and dominance of the visual over the verbal or oral." Some vehicles are branded with the party emblem, mission statement, aspirations, and ideology, as well as the candidate's photo. These cars operate on the road for both recreational and business purposes, informing the public about the activities of such parties.

The significance of images and print in a campaign lies in their ability to appeal to people's emotions, which, in turn, silently create voter convictions. This is consistent with Stephen's (2015) observation that many individuals are convinced by the use of pictures during advertising. This distinct attitude is conveyed through the vibrant display and careful placement of poster

material. According to Seidman (2012), the campaign that brought Margaret Thatcher to power three times in a row from 1979 to 1983 focused on emotions and issues rather than Thatcher herself, demonstrating the power of visuals and texts in creating a noise-free campaign. He goes on to add that these images and prints, made by Saatchi and Saatchi (an advertising agency), depicted a lengthy, snakelike line of people at the unemployment office, with the tagline, "Britain's better off with the Conservatives." As previously established, the creative arrangement of materials across any advertising media directly influences the audience's psychology to earn their votes. This eliminates the need for rallies or the use of horn speakers on vehicles to parade through streets, reducing noise and pollution in our environment.

Identifying and Interpreting Selected Campaign Materials

The data for this study focuses solely on the People's Democratic Party (PDP) gubernatorial election campaigns in Enugu State, with the aspirant identified as Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, also known as Gburugburu. Other political parties, including the Action People's Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Congress (PDC), also had governorship candidates. Still, this work focuses solely on the PDP gubernatorial race in Enugu State.



Figure 1: Campaign Billboard 1
©Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi Campaign Organisation (2015)

Figure 1 depicts a billboard reading "Vote Hon. Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi (Gburugburu) for Governor of Enugu State." The linguistic material on the yellow and white billboard is set against a white background to create contrast. On the right flank is a visual representation of the personality who was verbally portrayed on the left side of the campaign materials. The image in portrait format with traditional clothing appears welcoming and is sufficient to secure the people's mandate. The artwork's innovative representation, with its appropriate colour scheme and arrangement of verbal and nonverbal content, is said to have transmitted a holistic message to the masses.

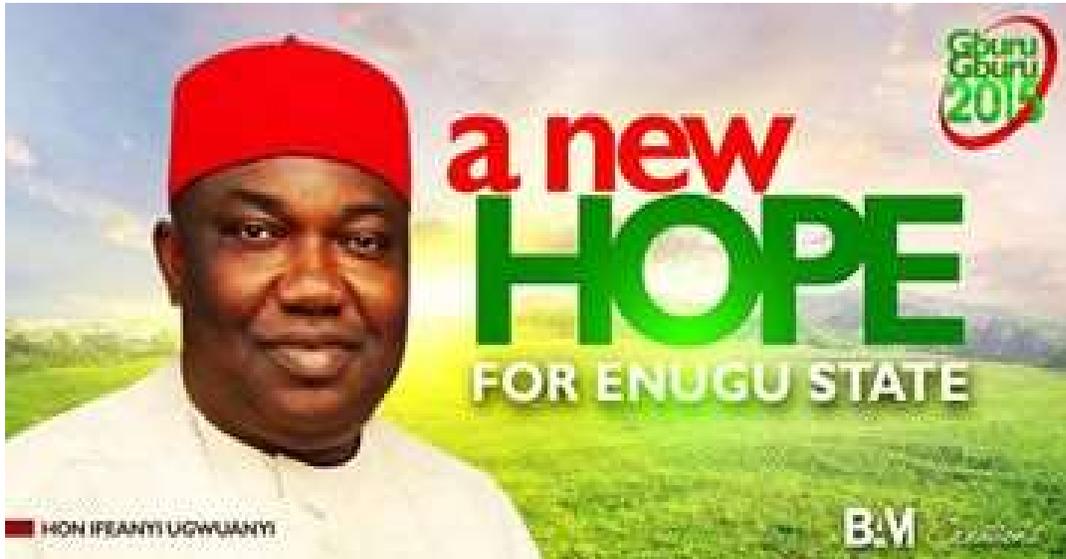


Figure 2: A new hope
©Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi Campaign Organisation (2015)

Figure 2 depicts another convincing campaign billboard with innovative rendering. The background design depicts a sunny day, with the sun rising on the horizon. The foreground depicts a soft green field, while the background features a light blue sky. The rising light on the horizon casts a soft reflection on the grassy plants and sky. The view gives the impression of a new dawn and a sign of new hope for the people. Complementing the scenario is a photo of the candidate on the left, with some captions on the right to persuade the voters. The inscription on the billboard, "A NEW HOPE FOR ENUGU STATE," reflects the overall design as shown in the image. This beautiful image effectively communicates the candidate's plan, program, and manifesto to the public without making any noise. This image has a lasting impression on the psyche. Visuals are more engaging to viewers, capture their attention, and can convey a message more quickly. In reality, if a picture is worth a thousand words, it is far more valuable than 140 characters (europedecides.eu/2014/04/9-more-visual-eu-election). Consider the contents of Figure 3.



Figure 3: This is my beloved son
©<https://d1jcea4y7xhp7190.cloudfront.net/2018/10/Enu>

Figure 3 features multiple prominent cut-out figures of the same person, giving him a commanding presence. This multiplies his visibility and suggests importance, power, and leadership. The central figure (in traditional attire) appears larger and more forward than the others—visually reinforcing his primary, or “main,” persona. At the same time, the flanking versions suggest different roles or facets (politician, community leader, even spiritual or visionary persona). Researchers analysing Nigerian campaign visuals emphasise that multimodal elements (image, text, colour) are used to shape perception. The use of colour, imagery, and gaze helps to unfold his identity, project authority, and make a memorable visual claim. According to semiotic theory, these design decisions are not accidental—they are deliberate and carefully chosen to persuade.

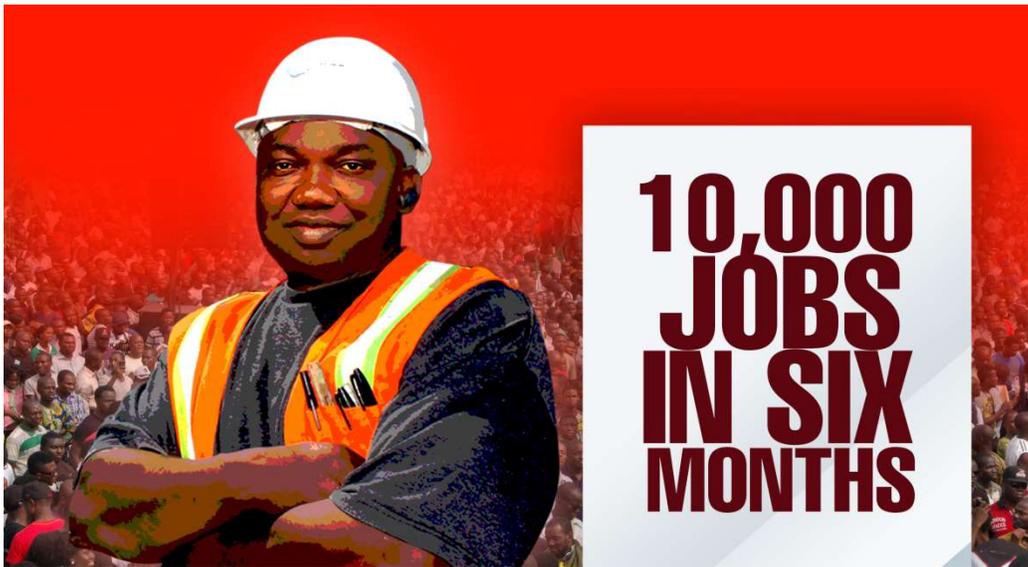


Figure 4: Campaign Billboard 4
©Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi Campaign Organisation (2015)

The Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi campaign, which prioritised job creation in Enugu State, understood that unemployment is the root cause of many, if not all, of society's social ills. Figure 4 depicts another colourful billboard advertisement that communicates the political aspirant's intention to create job opportunities in the state through graphic illustration. The background depicts a massive crowd, which represents the teeming multitude of unemployed individuals. The billboard depicts the aspirant in a work-ready suit, complete with a safety helmet and an apron. Figure 5 shows that Ugwuanyi is not only willing to work but also to serve.



Figure 5: Campaign Billboard 5
©Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi Campaign Organisation (2015)

Figure 5 permits multiple interpretations, allowing readers to derive meaning from their individual analytical perspectives. One of these is a willingness to serve the people. The background depicts a massive building with scaffolding and people hard at work. On the right side of the board, there is a photo of Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi, who is seeking the people's mandate. His entire regalia, including a helmet, an apron, and writing materials and working equipment in his left breast pocket, conveys a message of readiness to serve.

Stickers, along with posters and billboards, are used as campaign visuals. For example, the Ugwuanyi Campaign Organisation employed many types of stickers during the election campaign. Stickers are more versatile than posters and billboards, as they may be placed on doors, cars, books, and even Bibles. Figures 6 and 7 illustrate a few of these stickers.



Figure 6: Gburugburu Campaign Sticker 1
©Chukwunonso Uzoagba (2015)



Figure 7: *Gburugburu Campaign Stickers 2*
©Chukwunonso Uzoagba (2015)

Another form of visual advertising is automotive branding. This was also widely used during the Ifeanyi Ugwuanyi campaign, as shown in Figures 8 and 9. As the automobiles travel, people read the material written on them, learning about some of the political party's efforts in Enugu state.



Figure 8: Campaign branded car (1)
©Chukwunonso Uzoagba (2015)



Figure 9: Campaign branded car (2)
©Chukwunonso Uzoagba (2015)

Conclusion

Billboards are a core part of political campaigning in Nigeria. Outdoor media such as posters, billboards, and wall drapes provide 24-hour exposure to passersby. Their placement along major roads or in busy urban centres is key to maximising reach. This billboard is likely placed in an obvious location, designed for constant exposure to a broad cross-section of the public.

The discourse makes it clear that the essence of all forms of campaigning is to raise awareness and steer voters toward a specific party ideology. It was also shown that during this period of political sensitivity, uncontrolled noise can transform into noise. Noise pollution is recognised as a significant issue in both rural and urban areas worldwide. It harms human health and comfort, depending on its length and volume (decibels). The need to develop an alternative method for noise management in electioneering campaigns remains critical, as it will benefit the public

without causing a nuisance. The use of images and prints in political sensitisation is timely. However, the study was limited to a few visuals—billboards, stickers, and branded vehicles utilised in the PDP's 2015 gubernatorial race in Enugu State. Figures 1-5 show billboards; 6 and 7 are stickers; and 8 and 9 are branded autos. Given the visual and word combination, they conveyed a strong message. Having highlighted this two-dimensional creative presentation, the importance of images in campaigns, particularly their ability to control noise, has been adequately proven. A presentation with content on a flat surface, with height and width but no depth, is referred to as two-dimensional. Practically speaking, this refers to any visual communication that lacks spatial or physical depth and is presented on a plane.

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