Appraisal of the Campaign Strategies of Muhammadu Buhari's and Atiku Abubakar's Media Organizations in the 2019 Presidential Election

Chikwudi OKPOWHOR, Prof. Godwin B. OKON, & Barigbon G. NSEREKA, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This study was informed by the need to comparatively appraise the campaign strategies of the media (campaign) organizations of Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar. The study is anchored on the Framing Theory. Its population comprised all the registered voters of Rivers State put at 3,215,273. Moreso, a sample size of 385 was drawn using Raosoft; an online sample size calculator. The survey design was adopted for the study. The multistage sampling technique was used to draw respondents from the headquarters of the three senatorial districts of Rivers State. The questionnaire was the instruments for data collection. Data were presented and analysed using tables, percentage and weighted mean score on a four-point Likert scale. To this end, findings showed that electorate identified the candidates' catch phrases – "Next level" (368 or 96.2%) and Atikulated (372 or 100%). It was also revealed that for Buhari (107 or 28.8%) and television (113 or 30.4%) for Atiku. In this vein, the study among other positions concluded that although all candidates in elections adopt strategies, only painstakingly researched strategies lead to victory in elections. The study therefore recommends that there is the need for campaign organizations to have a robust media research unit. This will not only help the campaign organizations to carefully develop campaign messages but will also help in monitoring and evaluating over time the strengths and weaknesses of the campaigns. With these updates of strategies campaign organizations can take cognizance of prevailing realities and address them as well.

Keywords: Atiku, Buhari, Campaign, Campaign Organization, Campaign Strategy

Introduction

All over the world politics is a big deal. Like every other competitive environment, the stakes are relatively high. Incidentally the quest for power has never come without some showdown and stiff competition. This is occasioned by the fact that the "powers that be" are never in a hurry to relinquish power cheaply. Of course the glitz, glamour and lucre attached to public offices in Nigeria could be worth dying for when viewed from a prism (Osisioma, 2005 & Elike, 2011). This could explain why public office holders in Nigeria may stop at nothing to hold tenaciously to political power. Suffice to say that this firm grip to public office is not a matter of the form of government in practice. It is just a predominant trait of most leaders. Were it not for constitutional provisions that spell out the limit to which elective office holders can stay, especially in a democratic state, many leaders might continue to perpetuate their stay in office.

The respective campaign organizations of Buhari and Atiku framed their campaign messages differently. For Buhari, the focus was on consolidation of his change agenda. His campaigns were clear on consolidating on three cardinal agenda: fighting corruption, improve security and growing the economy. Fundamentally, these formed the anchor of his campaign strategy. The campaign team was guided by a campaign document titled "The Next Level". President Muhammadu Buhari eventually emerged the winner of the 2019 presidential election having defeated his strongest contender Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the PDP with 15,191,847 votes (Eze, 2019).

On the other hand, the flagship campaign document of Atiku Abubakar was titled 'Let's Get Nigeria Working Again' (Aliogo, 2018). The 63-page document listed human capital development, job creation, poverty eradication and infrastructure development as the corner stones of his economic policy (Aliogo, 2018). Atiku Abubakar's campaign messages were framed around these policy thrusts. In a mission to wrestle power from the incumbent, Atiku's campaign organization mobilized support for its candidate through so many groups including one named "Young Professionals". The emergence of the group invariably birthed a new word, "Atikulated" into the country's political lexicon (Dirisu, 2018). The "Next Level" tag line of Buhari and the "Atikulated" punch-word for Atiku were the main drivers of the different frames adopted by the respective campaign organizations of the two candidates.

Statement of the Problem

The frames adopted by the respective campaign handlers of the two leading presidential candidates in the 2019 presidential election are the main focus of the examination of this paper. By "frames" we mean the slants, the directions and the emphases of the messages that these organizations communicated. The paper assesses their messages with the knowing that underlying their rhetoric are intensely competitive 'salesman' strategies, simultaneously suggestive of the strong points of their candidate and indicting of the weaknesses of their opponents. Buhari's "Next Level" and Atiku's "Atikulated" being typical of such campaign rhetoric, are the main texts in the focus of this paper. The paper therefore seeks to comparatively appraise the campaign strategies underlying the respective uses of the texts adopted in the rhetoric of the campaign organizations of Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar in the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

Generally this study seeks to comparatively appraise the campaign strategies of President Buhari's media organization and Atiku's media organizations in the 2019 election. Specifically, the study sets out to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the campaign strategies of President Buhari and former Vice President Atiku's media organizations.
2. Examine the media mix components of Buhari's media organization and Atiku Abubakar's media organization with a view to streamlining similarities and dissimilarities.
3. Ascertain which of the two media campaign strategies are (is) geared towards grassroots mobilization or elitist mobilization or both.

Research Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant difference between the campaign strategies of Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar's media organizations in the 2019 presidential election.

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory provided the main theoretical basis of this work. The theory is treated hereunder.

Framing Theory

Framing Theory was propounded by Erving Goffman in 1974 (Doko & Ozohu-Suleiman, 2007). According to Dimitrova and Stromback (2005) cited in Chime-Nganya, Ezegwu and Ezeji (2017), Framing Theory refers to the methods by which communicators, e.g. campaign organizations, organize and present issues and events. As a dominant feature in the coverage of issues, framing is a strategy for communicating images to members of the public (Chime-Nganya et al., 2017). For Ofori-Birikorang (2010), communicators use framing to influence the direction of citizens' understanding of issues and of the possible actions that they can take.

Framing stems from the agenda-setting theory of the mass media, and particularly relates that the treatment of frames (sociological, psychological or philosophical) within which an issue is packaged or

slanted may dictate what and how audiences may likely perceive items from a communicator (Alawode & Adesanya, 2016). The idea of framing stemmed from agenda-setting theorists, who viewed it as a natural way in which second level agenda-setting occurs (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008 cited in Doko & Ozohu-Suleiman, 2017).

Mass media audiences experience items from communicators at two levels: the object and attribute levels. Agenda-setting is about *what* people think about (object level). However, framing extends to *how* people think about the issues raised by a communicator (attribute level). Emphasis for framing is to shift the public from the first level (the object level of agenda-setting) to laying emphasis on more important attributes of the object whilst leaving out the less important attributes (Ani, Nyekwere, Nwanguma & Ugwanyi, 2017). Doko and Ozohu-Suleiman (2017) adds that:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (p.44).

Both the Buhari and the Atiku campaign organizations couched their messages in ways explainable by Framing Theory. In other words, the communications of the two campaign organizations went beyond the object level to the attribute level in their respective messaging.

Conceptualizing Political Communication and Campaigns in Nigeria Political System

Political communication comprises all forms of verbal and non-verbal gestures geared towards persuading electorates and the public towards considering them as the best option in an election. Politicians use visual resources such as vests, head wears, dance and arrogate language among others to communicate meanings in the discourse with the central theme of seeking political support for certain politicians or political parties (Ademilokun & Olateju, 2016). Agudosi (2007) cited in Okoro and Santas (2017) defines political communication as the dissemination of information about the functioning of a political entity in order to influence the behaviour of the audience in a variety of ways. It is also the interactive process concerning transmission of information among politicians, the news media and the public (Agulosi, 2007, cited in Okoro & Santas, 2017). In the same vein, Althoff (1972) cited in Akasoro (2011) defines political communication as:

> The process by which politically-relevant information is transmitted from one part of the political system to another, and between the social and political systems. It is a continuous process involving the exchange of information between individuals and groups of individuals at all levels of society, and includes not only the expression of the views and wishes of members of society, but also the means by which the views and proposed of those in power are transmitted to the society and latter's reaction to those views and proposal (p.21).

Although, political communication is not restricted to elections and campaigns alone, they are usually political in nature. More so, political communication is seen in campaigns, political advertising and marketing. Campaigns for political parties are avenues to sell their programmes policies and candidates to electorates with a view to persuading them to vote for the candidates in elections. Politics is no less competitive and if candidates must stand a chance in this terrain then effective and strategic campaigning is required.

Communication Strategy

A good point to take on in this discourse is to first understand the concept of strategy. Etymologically, strategy looks on a military significance and represents the action of commanding or leading armies in times of war, i.e. a military campaign. It originally meant a way of prevailing over the adversary, a tool in

war, and only afterwards was it applied to other contexts and fields of human relationship – political, economics, business among others (Ghemawat, 2005; Stead & Stead, 2008). Therefore, strategy is historically linked to pre-empting different scenarios and action plans to be triggered on encountering them (Schaars, 1999, cited in Mainardes, Ferreira & Raposo, 2014). But then, the concept has been used indiscriminately in the field of management meaning anything from a precisely formulated course of action, a positioning in a particular environment, to the entire personality, the soul and existential rationale behind an organization's existence. It is therefore a concept often put forward in the academic and business worlds, filled with a great diversity and width, which in some aspects is complementary while divergent in others (Fahey, 1989, cited in Mainards et al., 2014).

Strategy is not only one way of dealing with an adversary in a competitive environment or market, as treated by much of the literature and its popular use, as it cannot only summarize the ideas, proposals, and guidelines indicative of paths and solutions (Mintzberg & Quinn, 1991 cited in Mainardes et al., 2014). Rather strategy has a breadth and scope that encircles the concept of operational efficiency and cannot be confused with its tactics. By this, strategy is not something static or finished, which renders the concept complex and difficult to grasp (Porter, 1996; Porth, 2002; Dess, Lumpkin & Eisner, 2007, cited in Mainardes et al., 2014).

Research Methodology

This study adopted the survey method of research. This study gathered all its data from respondents, hence the survey method. Quantitative data were collected through survey. The population of this study comprised the registered voters in Rivers State. Accordingly, the number of registered voters in Rivers State for the 2019 election is 3,215,273 (INEC, 2019). The sample size drawn from the population of voters in Rivers State was determined using Raosoft, an online sample size calculator (see raosoft.com/sample size calculator). Therefore at a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%, the sample size for the population of 3,215,273 was 385. Multi-stage sampling technique was the sample technique employed to arrive at this sample. In the first stage, cluster sampling technique was used to group the local government areas in each senatorial district. In the second stage, purposive sampling was used to select the three headquarters of the local government areas of the three senatorial districts of Rivers State. For Rivers South-East, Khana Local Government Area was selected, for Rivers East, Port Harcourt was selected while for Rives West, Degema was selected. In the third stage, simple random sampling technique was then used to select the electorate wards, electoral units and the streets per local government areas. In the fourth and final stage, a systematic sampling technique was employed to select the households to be surveyed, using a three-point (3) skip interval. Below is a breakdown of the proportionate distribution of questionnaire by senatorial districts.

Table 3.1: Proportionate Sampling of Respondents by Senatorial Districts

S/No.	Senatorial District	Population	Sample Size
1.	Rivers East	1, 104, 131 $\frac{1,104,131}{3,215,273} x\ 385 = 132$	132
2.	Rivers South-East	1,082,614 $\frac{1,082,614}{3,215,273} x\ 385 = 130$	130
3.	Rivers West	1,028,528 $\frac{1,082,528}{3,215,273} x\ 385 = 123$	123
			385

The instrument for data gathering for this study was a questionnaire administered on the voters. The questionnaire consisted of two (2) sections, which are the demographic and psychographic sections. The demographic section elicited personal information from respondents. Questions under this section include respondents' sex, age, educational qualification, and occupation. Also, the psychographic section covered all variables related to the study. For instance, questions elicited respondents' positions on their perception of candidates' media strategies, whether or not their attitude towards candidates changed after exposure to campaign materials, and whether the strategies affected their voting behaviour.

Description of Sample

A total of 385 copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents drawn from the three senatorial districts of Rivers State; i.e. Khana (Rivers South-East), Degema (Rivers-West) and Port Harcourt (Rivers East), using the multi-stage sampling technique. To this end, the 372 (96.6%) respondents is deemed adequate for the study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Distribution of Registered/Voters in 2019 Presidential Election

Question	Yes	No	Total	%
Are you a registered voter?	286	86	372	100
Did you vote in the 2019 president election?	216	156	372	100

Table 1 above shows that 286 (76.9%) of the respondents were registered while 216 (58.1%) voted in the 2019 presidential election. The implication of this result is that more respondents registered (286 or 76.9%) than voted (216 or 58.1%) in the 2019 presidential election.

Table 2: Responses on awareness of candidates' catchphrases

Question	Buhari	Atiku	Total
Who used the phrase "Next Level" in the campaign for 2019 election?	358	14	372
Who used the word "Atikulated" in the campaign for 2019 election?	0	372	372
Who used the sentence "Let's make Nigeria great again" in the campaign for 2019 election?	16	356	372
Who used "4+4" sign in the campaign for 2019 election?	350	22	372

Table 2 above shows respondents' knowledge and (level of) awareness of the catch phrases used by the presidential candidates of the PDP and APC in the 2019 presidential elections. The table showed that 358 (96.2%) attributed the "Next level" phrase to President Muhammadu Buhari of the APC, while the phrase "Atikulated" was recognized by 372(100%) who linked it to Alhaji Atiku Abubakar the presidential candidate of the PDP. Also 356(95.7%) respondents could link the phrase "Let's make Nigeria great again" to the PDP presidential candidate. The "4+4" sign was identified by 350 (94.1%) respondents, attributing it to the APC presidential candidate. This result is instructive against the fact that it showed that voter education and political consciousness seems to be on the increase among the electorate in Nigeria.

Table 3: Presidential campaigns addressing nagging national issues

Likert scale item	SA	A	D	SD	F	WMS	Decision
The campaign of Buhari addressed nagging national issues	47	139	136	50	927	2.5	Agree
The campaign of Atiku addressed nagging national issues	48	141	131	52	929	2.5	Agree

Table 3 above shows that most respondents (141) agree that the campaign of Atiku Abubakar of the PDP addressed nagging national issues than President Muhammadu Buhari's of the APC, with 139 respondents agreeing to the position. The implication of this result is that it seems more respondents believe that Atiku Ababukar's campaign messages addressed the nagging national issues than President Muhammadu Buhari's.

Table 4: Comparison between convincing presidential campaigns

Questionnaire Item	Buhari	Atiku	Total
Which one of the two campaigns did you find more convincing?	192	180	372

Table 4 above reveals that comparison between the campaigns of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the PDP and President Muhammadu Buhari of the APC in terms of how respondents found them convincing. To this end, most of the respondents (192 or 51.6%) found President Muhammadu Buhari's campaigns more convincing that Atiku's. The implication of this result is very intriguing as it appeared to have been triggered by respondents' perception on the personalities of the candidates against their campaigns messages.

Table 5: Social media channels used for accessing presidential campaigns

Questionnaire Item	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	YouTube	WhatsApp	Total
Through which of the following social media channels did you get to know about the campaigns of President Muhammadu Buhari for 2019 elections?	131	101	71	41	28	372
Through which of the following social media channels did you get to know about the campaigns of Atiku Abubakar for 2019 elections?	138	110	55	38	31	372

Table 5 above shows that most respondents got to know about the campaigns of Muhammadu Buhari through the Facebook (131 or 35.2%) social media platform, while 138(37.1%) respondents got to know about Atiku Abubakar's campaigns through the Facebook as well. This result lends credence to the growing use of the social media for election and political campaigns in Nigeria.

Table 6: Responses on presidential campaigns appealing more to grassroots

Questionnaire Item	Buhari	Atiku	Total
Which of the two campaigns appealed to the grassroots more?	277	125	372
Which of the two campaigns appealed to the elite more?	111	261	372
Which of the two campaigns appealed to both elite and grassroots simultaneously?	171	201	372

Table 6 above shows the frequency of presidential campaigns of President Muhammadu Buhari and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar that appealed to either the grassroots, or elites or both. The result therefore revealed that President Buhari's campaigns appealed more (247 or 66.4%) to the grassroots as against Alhaji Abubakar's (125 or 33.6%) campaign messages. Conversely, Atiku Abubakar's campaign messages appealed more to the elites (261 or 70.2%) than the Muhammadu Buhari's (111 or 29.8%). The result also revealed that Atiku's campaign messages appealed to both the elite and grassroots simultaneously (201 or 54.0%). The implication of this result is that it appeared the candidates had their campaign strategies targeted at particular demography of the citizens even if it was intended for all.

Testing of Hypotheses

Ho_1: There is no significant difference between the campaign strategies of Muhammadu Buhari and Atiku Abubakar's media organizations in the 2019 presidential election.

Aggregation Index

	O	E	O-E	$(O-E)^2$	$\sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
Buhari	724	352.2	371.8	138,235.24	392.5
Atiku	764	392.2	371.8	138,235.24	352.4
					744.9

Chi calculated = 744.9
Degree of freedom = 4
Chi critical = 9.49
If Xcal > Xcrit reject the null hypothesis.

At a P-value of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected because the chi calculated is greater than the chi critical. This means that there is a significant difference between the overall activities of Muhammadu Buhari's and Atiku Abubakar's media organizations in their respective campaign strategies.

Discussion of Findings

What campaign strategies were adopted by the media organizations of President Buhari and former Vice President Atiku?

Findings revealed respondents level of awareness of the major campaign strategies adopted by the presidential candidates of the APC, President Muhammadu Buhari and the PDP's Alhaji Atiku Abubakar. The result indicated that 368 (96.2%) could identify that the catch phrase "Next level" was used by President Buhari of the APC while all 372(100%) linked the phrase "Atikulated" to Alhaji Abubakar of

the PDP. Also, the sentence "Lets make Nigeria great again" was identified by 356 respondents, representing 95.7% of the respondents. Again, 350 (94.1%) respondents attributed the "4+4" sign to President Buhari of the APC. This result is indicative of the fact that the candidates' media campaign organizations adopted the use of catch phrases and signs to distinguish them from the opposition

What are the media mix components of Buhari's media organization and Atiku Abubakar's media organization with respect to the 2019 election?

Findings indicated that the electorate got to know of the People's Democratic Party', Atiku Abubakar and the All Progressives Congress' (APC) President Muhammadu Buhari, through the various media mixes used by the media campaign organization. However findings indicated that while respondents were exposed to the Buhari's campaigns was through the radio medium (107 or 28.8%) that of Atiku was mostly via the television medium (113 or 30.4%). Significantly, this result points to the use of the media for political communication, a trend that is existed from pristine and still finds greater relevance today. Incidentally, it is almost impossible not to use the media in any campaign for elections. Like the advertisement of products on the media, with the intent to persuade customers to patronize goods and services, that is how the media are being used to advertise candidates for elections. This finding therefore corroborates Alawode and Adesanya (2016) who argue that it has become apparent that politics has been one of the main stays of the media in Nigeria and indeed the global community whether as news features, opinions advertisements and advertorials.

Which of the two media campaign strategies are (is) geared towards grassroots mobilization or elitist mobilization or both?

Findings indicated that the campaign messages of Atiku (261 or 70.2%) and Buhari (277 or 66.4%) both appealed to the grassroots and elites. By implication, the campaign messages of the candidates were designed to cut across the social strata of the nation. This is synonymous with product segmentation, where products are patterned towards the various segments of the market. Incidentally campaign messages are connected in ways that could address the peculiarities of these social classes, while appealing to them. Overall, the electorate in these social strata and more likely to participate in elections when campaign messages are more effectively and better informs intended voters, motivating them to vote on election day.

Conclusion

These days elections are not won by sheer wishes and ambition. They are won by strategies. Expectedly, all candidates in elections adopt different strategies. But in the end, only the painstakingly researched strategies eventually lead to victory in elections. Granted that a number of intervening variables determine voters' choices of candidates it has become increasingly imperative that campaign strategies take cognizance of such active factors.

Recommendations

Drawing from the conclusion above the following recommendations are here put forward.

1. There is the need for campaign organizations to have a robust media research unit. This will not only help the campaign organizations to carefully develop campaign messages but will also (help in) monitoring and evaluating overtime the strengths and weaknesses of the campaigns.

2. Similarly, campaign messages should be couched in such ways that emphasize the feasibility of certain campaign positions. This way, there is the possibility that the electorate could be convinced to consider voting for the candidates

3. The fact that it is difficult to differentiate between what messages are meant for what class of electorate makes the effect of campaign messages lost in some instances. To mitigate this, media campaign organizations should endeavor to first segment the voters based on their psychographic positioning and design messages to address their peculiarities.

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