

## **Aspirants' Agendas and Party Ideology in Newspaper Political Ads in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article used Roland Barthe's *Rhetoric of the Image* to analyse newspaper political ads of two presidential aspirants of a political party that defined Nigeria's nascent democracy from 1999 to 2015. Semiotics was employed as a theory and method to engender an understanding of how persuasive messages are used to elicit party support in Nigerian and by extension, African political communication systems. It can be inferred from the evidence that the candidates' rhetoric was conveyed using denotative and connotative messages. The linguistic messages were conveyed through denotative meanings using *anchorage* and *relay* – two functions of linguistic messages in ads – to direct the reader to preferred meanings and to add extra meaning to a preferred one. The connotations from the ad visuals were conveyed using polysemic meanings. However, the visuals did not signify the party's ideology, though ideology is the common domain of the signified in ad visuals. Overall, the *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* were instruments in conveying the aspirants' persuasive messages on salient economic, political and social issues.

*Keywords:* Culture, Print media, Semiotics

### **INTRODUCTION**

Political advertising in this article refers to the purchase of advertising space at

commercial rates, to transmit political messages to a mass audience. This type of media may include cinema, billboards, the press, radio, and television (McNair, 2007, p. 86). However, forms of political

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advertising are determined by the political communication system in a society. For instance, in the United States, voters are exposed to television and radio political ads (Bartels, 2014; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999), direct or electronic mails, websites and party blogs, text messages, social media and rallies (Biagi, 2012). In contrast, political rallies, radio and TV jingles, mobile phones, newspapers, magazines, billboards, posters and social media are common forms of political ads and campaigns in Nigeria. This study analysed political advertising in Nigerian newspapers because of its elitist nature (Adesonaye, 1990, p. 63). Newspapers are also a strategic media for targeting political elites, who are the audience of the political ads analysed in this study.

The analyses in the current explored political ads that promoted the candidature of immediate past Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan and former Vice President Atiku Abubakar in Nigerian newspapers. The two contested for the presidential candidacy of Nigeria's erstwhile ruling party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) during the 2011 election. Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 after over two decades of military dictatorship. The PDP controlled and redefined the country's political landscape for 16 years, from 1999 until 2015, when it lost the presidency and most state and parliamentary posts went to the current ruling party, the All Progressive Congress (APC).

In conceptualising how political parties should operate in Nigeria, the PDP introduced

a power sharing principle between Nigeria's South and North for two-terms of eight-years each, and Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba from Western Nigeria emerged president on PDP's platform from 1999 to 2007. The late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was the party's presidential candidate and winner in the 2007 presidential elections. The PDP's power sharing principle was truncated when Yar'Adua died before completing the North's first tenure. Goodluck Jonathan, an Ijaw, one of Nigeria's several ethnic minorities from the South, who was Yar'Adua's deputy, became president. Osaghae (1998, p. 3) posits that ethnic minorities are in contradistinction to major groups coexisting in the political systems. They experience systemic discrimination due to their numerical inferiority status and a host of historical and sociological factors, which leads them to take political action to further their collective interests. Therefore, the Ijaws and Southern Nigerians, as ethnic minorities furthered their political interests and argued that the incumbent at the time had constitutional rights to contest. Meanwhile, the second aspirant, Atiku Abubakar was the Northern Nigerian consensus candidate. He sought to complete the North's second tenure based on the PDP's power sharing principle. Jonathan was eventually elected PDP's candidate and president during the 2011 presidential elections.

The 2011 contest challenged the party's multi-ethnic framework for distributing political and nominative positions. Meanwhile, Kendhammer (2010) notes that the PDP held itself together with an

elaborate but largely informal system of power-sharing as a commitment by party leaders to distribute the highest-ranking positions in the government and in the party according to six geographic zones that represent ethnic realities.

In Nigeria, party politics is still enmeshed in ethnic alliances. No brilliant creative political ad can perform wonders for a candidate if he or she does not belong to a favoured specific region, religion or party (Ayeni, 2011, p. 51). There is also a struggle between individuals seeking to monopolise State power on behalf of sub-national communities in Nigeria (Joseph, 2014).

Therefore, we studied the political ads of the presidential aspirants of Nigeria's most influential political party (at the time), which targeted delegates who voted for the party's candidate for the 2011 presidential elections at a national convention to fill a dearth in semiotic research literature on political advertising in Nigeria and to understand how political party aspirants' campaign for support of political elites in a sub-set of an African political communication system. This is because political parties are at the constitutional heart of the democratic political process (McNair, 2007, p. 7), and we explored newspaper political ads to uncover aspirants' agenda and theorise their party's ideology because Eco (as cited in Woollacott, 2005, p.87) argues that, ideology is the final connotation of the totality of connotations of the sign or the context of signs. Furthermore, the analyses herein are the researchers' subjective

interpretations within the contexts of the study area. Therefore, the findings are by no means universal. However, it contributes to the knowledge on Africa's political communication systems by using semiotics as a theory and methodology to explore the meanings embedded in newspaper political ads, considering that semiotics is rarely used as an alternative content analysis approach in researching Nigerian political communication media texts.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study used assumptions from Roland Barthes' Rhetoric of the Image exemplified in his classic analyses of the *Panzini* (Italian pasta) advert. Barthes (1977, 1978) argue that the first message in any advertising is linguistic, which is supported by the caption and the labels. The second and third messages are denoted and connoted. Meanwhile, the linguistic message is two-fold: denotational and connotational, where the first is literal and the second is cultural, and therefore, symbolic.

The linguistic message functions in two ways: anchorage and relay. The most frequent function in the former is to signify multiple meanings and interpretations (polysemy). But anchorage is also used to focus on one of the many meanings, or direct the reader to choose a preferred intended meaning and ignore other meanings. The function of the latter is to add meaning so that both text and image work together to convey intended meaning (Barthes, 1977, pp. 155-157; McCabe, 2009).

In addition, the denoted meaning in an image is literal while the connoted meaning, which is the “rhetoric of the image”, is often cultural, and includes all the visual elements, that can be employed as signifiers. Thus, the connoted meaning varies, and may depend on different kinds of knowledge – practical, national, cultural, aesthetic, etc. However, the common domain of the signified connotation is ideology (Barthes, 1977, pp. 158-162; McCabe, 2009).

### **POLITICAL ADVERTISING AND SEMIOTIC RESEARCH TRADITIONS IN NIGERIA**

Most research on Nigerian political campaigns use quantitative content analysis to examine TV ads on cross-cultural products, commercial advertising in print and broadcast media, and electoral choices (Alozie, 2003, 2010, 2011; Olatunji & Akinjogbin, 2011; Olujide, Adeyemi, & Gbadeyan, 2011; Oyedele & Minor, 2012). For instance, political advertising significantly affected electoral choices (Olujide et al., 2011), and most Nigerian newspaper political ads (49.5%) in the 2007 presidential elections which were sponsored by political parties were significantly negative, and did not comply with regulatory laws (Olatunji & Akinjogbin, 2011). Consumer ads maintained an ideological position of patriarchy, promoted imperialism and dependency, encouraged unemployment and promoted the failure of Nigerian manufacturing industry (Alozie, 2011). However, this study explored the gap in literature on political advertising

in Nigerian newspapers using semiotic theoretical and methodological perspectives to uncover the agenda of political aspirants seeking Nigeria’s highest political office. This is contextualised in a political party communication system. In a country where power is essentially contested (Axford, 1997), PDP aspirants deployed various tactics to secure the presidential candidacy of their party. Additionally, Nigeria plays an influential role in Africa as well as the global economy and politics and recently witnessed a political Tsunami with a shift in power from a political party which held sway for over 16 years since the country’s return to democracy in 1999.

### **POLITICAL AGENDA AND IDEOLOGY IN NIGERIA**

Political agenda are a set of issues that are the subject of decision-making and debate within a given political system at any one time (McCombs, 1981), while ideologies are a shared framework of mental models possessed by groups of individuals to provide both an interpretation of the environment and a prescription on how an environment should be structured, according to Parsons (as cited in Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009, p. 309). Ideologies also describe or interpret the world by making assertions or assumptions about human nature, historical events, present realities, and future possibilities. It envisions an ideal world and specifies acceptable means of attaining socio-economic and political ideals (Jost et al., 2009, p. 309).

Another vehicle for conveying political agenda and ideology is the media. McNair (2011, p. 47) posits that the media provides cognitive knowledge, informing people about what is happening, in addition to providing order and structure to political reality, allotting greater or lesser significance to events according to their presence or absence on the media agenda. McNair (2007, p. 6) further argues that the media does not just serve as an intermediary between political organisations and citizens; it provides a channel through which persuasive messages of political candidates and parties are conveyed to citizens using various elements, including political advertisements. In the context of this paper, agendas in the newspaper political ads of the aspirants during the 2011 PDP presidential candidate election conveyed aspirants' persuasive messages on economic, political and social issues salient to Nigerians at the time.

Meanwhile, Omotola (2009) juxtaposed ideological dispositions of Nigerian political parties under successive republics to infer that manipulation of ethnicity and religion as well as dominance of money politics effectively relegated political ideology to the background. Musawa (2014) asserts that Nigerian political parties lack party ideology while Oluwatola (2014) argues that Nigeria does not need ideologically-driven political parties but adequate competition in the political space, and that whatever political ideology drives a party, the goal is to better the lives of the electorate by fulfilling electoral promises.

Interestingly, it is not new that political party ideologies define political landscapes of global democracies. Different political spectra defined Nigerian political parties in pre- and post-independence era. The ideological differences were congruent in serving diverse needs and aspirations of the party. Early Nigerian political parties such as the Northern People's Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG) and the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) were dominant in Northern, Western and Eastern Nigeria respectively with different political beliefs.

Omotola (2009, p. 131) asserts that ideologically, the NPC was essentially a conservative and elitist party; the AG appeared to be progressive and socialist; while the NCNC was welfarist and predicated on the nationalist ideology. There are commentaries that the ideological beliefs drove the social regional organisation and accounted for disparities, for example, in gaps on western education between Western and Northern Nigeria. Therefore, Nwangwu and Ononogbu (2014) explained that ideology is an essential ingredient of viable political parties and the fundamental basis for socio-political mobilisation. Oluwatola (2014) highlights that ideological classifications were untenable in the reality of current political practices within the argument that what matters are politics driven by interests, protection of the rights of many, and a focus on what is in the best interest of the majority. Nonetheless, Nwangwu and Ononogbu (2014) argue

that in Nigeria, instead of mobilising people around issues of development on a horizontal basis, the political elites are manipulating the people with regional, ethnic and religious prejudices to create barren development.

### **A BRIEF ON NEWSPAPER AND POLITICS IN NIGERIA**

Some factors that nurtured early Nigerian press historically include ethnic and regional configurations (Oso, Odunlami, & Adaja, 2011). During the regional era, each of Nigeria's Eastern, Northern and Western governments and political parties had loyal newspapers engaged in regional bitter polemics (Oso et al., 2011; Sobowale, 1985; Uche, 1989). At present, there are many state-run newspapers in Nigeria that are operated and funded by state governments and are circulated within those states as well as a few neighbouring towns. There are also over 100 private commercial print media proprietors in the country (Akingbulu & Bussiek, 2010), and these owners are former state governors, influential politicians, oil magnates and business moguls and a few veteran journalists.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study purposively analysed political ads in two Nigerian newspapers: *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian*, based on their strength of circulation and publication of political ads of the aspirants. There are no reliable newspaper circulation figures in Nigeria (Alozie, 2011; Oladoyinbo, 2013; Oxford-Business-Group, 2012).

However, the 2010 Advertisers Association of Nigeria (ADVAN) report showed that *The Guardian* sold 25,222 copies, while the *Daily Trust* sold 11,672 copies daily. These two newspapers are the top seven highest selling and most influential newspapers in Nigeria (Akingbulu & Bussiek, 2010). *Daily Trust* is the most widely read newspaper in Northern Nigeria and is owned by a group of private proprietors from the North (Musa & Ferguson, 2013). *The Guardian* is a vintage newspaper that appeals to influential members of society, and is the flagship of the Nigerian press (Akingbolu, 2011).

Political ads that appeared in dailies were sampled from November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 to January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011 when the campaign commenced and ended with the PDP national convention where delegates elected the party's presidential candidate. Sampling dates, Bryman, Teevan, and Bell (2009, p. 204) observed, are sometimes dictated by the occurrence of interest. A total of 34 political ads were found in 26 editions of the sample population within the period - 26 adverts in *Daily Trust* and 8 in *The Guardian*. The ads were assigned random numbers from 1 to 34. Subsequently, a seven-day weekly table was constructed and samples of the political ads were selected using simple random sampling with a one-week interval to select four political ads for each aspirant, and a total of eight political ads for the analysis.

The visuals were analysed using Roland Barthes' Rhetoric of the Image classical analyses of the Panzini (Italian pasta) advert as indicated in the theoretical framework.

The unit of analysis was restricted to the visuals, including language, which according to Saussure (as cited in Danesi, 2004) is a system of signs that expresses ideas. These include words and phrases supporting the political ads. These were used to explore denotative and connotative meanings, since a key assumption of semiotics is that surface signs are related to an underlying structure with a related assumption that there is an underlying structure (Feldman, 1995). Denotative meaning refers to the basic meaning whereas a connotative meaning refers to deep-culturally rooted contextual meanings among Nigerians. In addition, since semiotics is fundamentally cultural in its approach (Feldman, 1995), codes and sub-codes within the Nigerian context were applied in the light of a general framework of cultural references. This is more so that codes guide interpretation in an environment where interpretation unfolds (Danesi, 2004). These subjective interpretations are appropriate because Krippendorff (2004, p. 33) argues that in content analysis, a context is always someone's construction, the conceptual environment of a text, the situation in which it plays a role.

The following were analysed: headlines and sub-headlines, slogans, text/body-copy, blurbs, boxes/panels, identification marks, closing ideas and illustrations. The signs were systematically clustered using Feldman (1995, pp. 21-24) three-column table technique for handling qualitative data in semiotic analysis. The first column denotes, the second connotes, and the third contextualises institutional concerns.

Descriptions of all uses of the concepts of interest were denoted in the first column. The second column underscored what the concepts mean when Nigerians talk about it and relied on one of the researchers' understanding of the context and culture to draw a pattern that can show the significance to both the researcher and the audience. The third column was used to identify the issues of concern to Nigeria as a nation during the 2011 Presidential Election as well as clarifying various contexts.

The signs consist of trichotomies based on the works of Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce (1955) argues that signs comprise an *icon*, an *index* or a *symbol*. An *icon* is a sign that refers to the object that it denotes merely by characters of its own, and which it possesses, and is embodied in the form of an object. An *index* refers to the object or event that it denotes by being very affected by that object, hence establishing an association between the *index* and the object. A *symbol* is a societally established law or convention in general which loses the character that makes it a sign if there was no interpretation. Therefore, icons represent objects mainly by similarity and exude semblance, indexes establish association with an object and symbols are signs interpreted from experience as replicated by rules within a social context.

## FINDINGS

### Denotations from the Political Ads

The denotations from Atiku Abubakar's political ads were interwoven as the selling

points of his candidacy to portray him as a patriotic citizen, a visionary leader and one whose election promises to bring infrastructural and economic development. The denotative meanings were conveyed in both linguistic and visual messages. The linguistic messages appeared in captions and labels using *anchorage* and *relay*. Anchorage directs the reader to preferred meanings while relay adds extra meaning to the preferred one, which the reader's attention is being directed to. In Figure 1, for example, the caption 'Atiku: Candidate for All Nigerians' signifies that Atiku has been endorsed by all Nigerians. Anchorage was also used to influence the reader to perceive him as a patriotic citizen using texts and backgrounds with emerald green colour of Nigeria's national flag as a national symbol as exemplified in Figures 1 to 4. Additionally, anchorage functioned in Figure 2 to signify Atiku's rhetoric in terms of developmental and economic policy thrusts. Meanwhile, relay is used as the second function of a linguistic message to complement the meanings from anchorage. For example, relay is used in Figure 1 where the traditional titles held by Atiku across the nation's geographic regions are specified. This is used to complement the linguistic message anchored on endorsement. Similarly, in Figure 3, the caption 'The difference is Not LUCK!', is a satirical coinage from the name of his fellow contestant, and former president, Goodluck Jonathan, to direct the reader to conceive Atiku as a leader with a progressive development agenda. Comparison is made between Nigeria and the Britain by exemplifying that in 1881

when British homes and factories were lit with electricity, 15 years later (in 1896), a 60-kilowatt electricity generating plant was also commissioned in Lagos, which was a British colony at the time. This relay function in Figure 3 shows Atiku's leadership symbolises a new dawn of patriotic leadership that will provide the infrastructure that has eluded Nigerians for decades and has been its bane causing its under-development. The closing idea in Figure 3, 'vote wisely...' also uses relay as a linguistic device to complement the anchored message that Atiku, who has the endorsement of the royal elites, is the best leader PDP can bequeath to Nigerians.

In addition, the denotative messages in the visuals of the political ads of Atiku, for example, Figure 1, indicate that he is the candidate endorsed by Nigeria's royal elite based on his appearances in Northern, Eastern, Southern and Western Nigerian traditional attires. His corporate attire is endorsement by the white-collar sector, comprising civil servants and private and business sectors. The visuals in Figure 2 for example, also portray him as the choice of northern Nigerians signified by his typical Northern Nigerian traditional attires in Figures 2 and 4, as well as the photos in Figures 1 and 2 with *Babban riga* and *damanga*. The former is a typical Northern Nigerian traditional flowing gown and the latter is a typical Northern Nigerian cap. These significations appeal to Northern Nigerian delegates to visualise Atiku as 'The Candidate' of Northern Nigeria. However, the denotative meaning in the visuals in Figure 4, unlike previous ones, is

polysemic. It could signify that Atiku has political power or control as a great leader. The headline ‘A symbol of democracy’ and Atiku’s towering photo also combine linguistic anchorage to signify him as a symbol of democracy with polysemic denotative meanings of a powerful man or someone with a large following. In most of his ads, Atiku was also depicted as someone who is dynamic, with the penchant for imbibing contemporary global trends and technological tools for communication such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* due to the constant placement of those social media logos on his ads. These social media platforms are popular in Nigeria and appeals to youth, a burgeoning segment in Nigeria and among the delegates who voted at PDP’s 2011 convention.

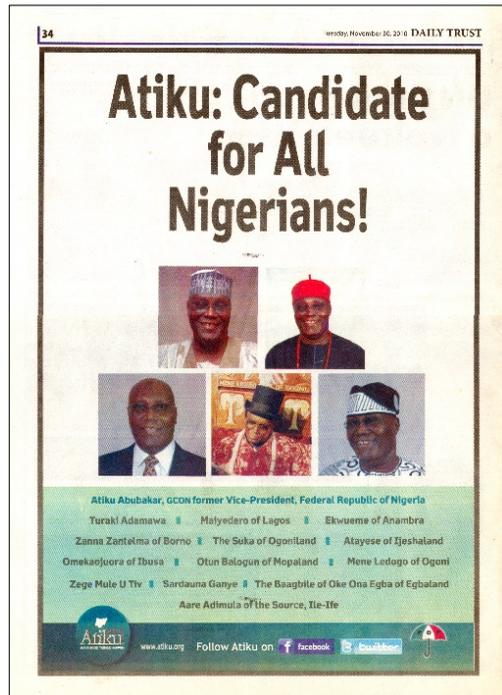


Figure 1. Daily Trust, November 30, 2010, p. 34

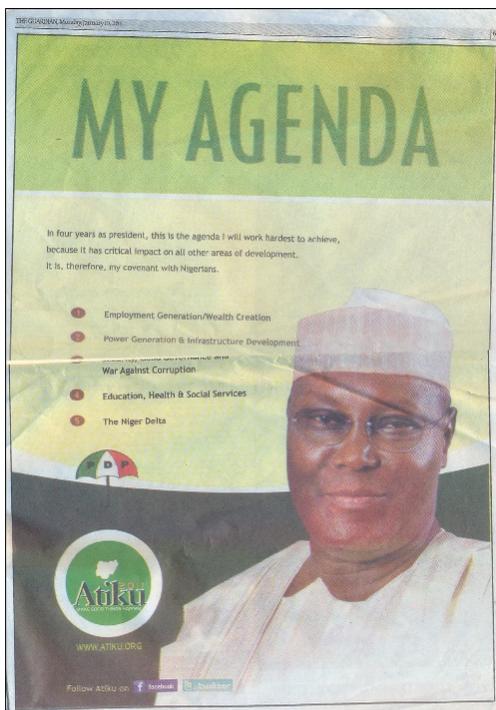


Figure 2. The Guardian, January 10, 2011, p. 61

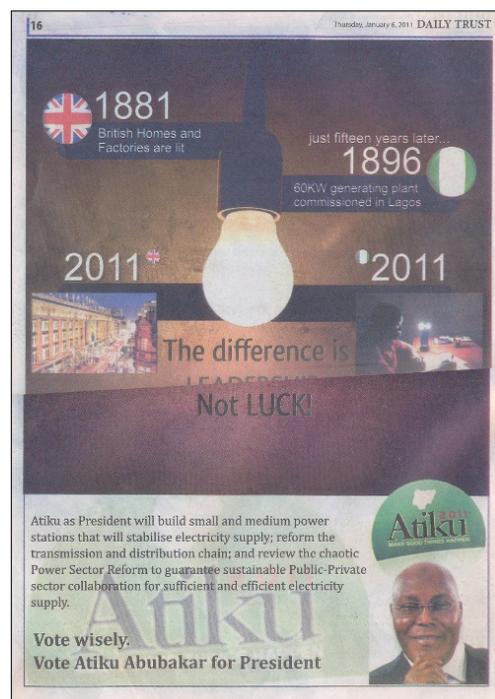


Figure 3. Daily Trust, January 6, 2011, p. 16



Figure 4. *The Guardian*, December 6, 2010, p. 26

Similarly, the denotative meanings of Goodluck Jonathan's ads were also conveyed using linguistic and visual messages. The linguistic messages were conveyed using anchorage and relay in captions and labels. The denotative meanings conveyed messages of unity, endorsement, political participation and economic development.

In Figure 5 for example, the linguistic message used anchorage to signify that Jonathan was the candidate to guarantee Nigeria's unity and thus: 'NORTH, SOUTH, EAST OR WEST, WE ARE ONE NIGERIA'. The sub-caption 'Support Nigeria's Consensus Candidate Chosen by 150 Million Wise Men & Women' uses

another linguistic function – relay – to signify endorsement, and as a supplement to the preferred message that was conveyed using anchorage. In addition, the denotative signification in the visuals (in Figure 5), portray Jonathan's endorsement with his appearance in traditional regalia and textual illustrations to show his endorsement by traditional leadership across Nigeria's diverse ethnicities<sup>1</sup>. This gigantic picture of Jonathan in *babban riga* and *damanga* – the former, a typical Northern Nigerian traditional flowing gown and the latter, a typical Northern Nigerian cap – superimposed on a green-white-green coloured Nigerian map surrounded by miniscule pictures in Southern, Eastern and Western Nigerian traditional attire denotes a counter-narrative to the Northern Nigerians on PDP's power sharing arrangement discussed in the introductory section. It depicts him as the choice candidate of Nigeria's diverse ethnicities. It also countered the regional divisive political rumbling within the party. Jonathan is from Nigeria's South. Depicting him in Northern Nigerian traditional attire ascribes to him Northern Nigerian heritage and eligibility as its candidate. This narrative is accompanied by the Nigerian national flag as a symbol of authority in the background. This is his endorsement as a 'consensus

<sup>1</sup>Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups who speak over 450 dialects.

candidate chosen by 150 million wise men and women’.

Meanwhile, the denotive messages from the ads sponsored by Jonathan did not only focus on promoting his candidacy, but also on using negative propaganda campaign against his opponent. These are depicted in Jonathan's ad in Figures 6 and 7 which used a campaign of calumny to demonise Atiku as an agent of doom and corruption. The linguistic message uses both anchorage and relay to conceive tales of horror, and depict Atiku as a desperate politician whose corruption with impunity attracted the wrath of ‘big brother’ America. The visual in Figure 6 signify horrific tales of agony and destruction of lives and property as consequences to Nigerians if Atiku becomes the presidential candidate of the PDP in the 2011 elections. Equally, the labels in Figure 7 linked one of Atiku's wives to corruption and to establish his corrupt personality.

The linguistic message in Figure 8 uses anchorage to signify Jonathan as the candidate that would support creative minds and entrepreneurs with the bold inscription: ‘Behind every enterprising entrepreneur will be his government's support’. The additional sub-caption ‘Goodluck Jonathan understands the despair of a young man or woman who can create but is unable to. Those days will soon be over. Vote Goodluck Jonathan’ uses relay to reiterate the initial message in the anchored preferred linguistic message to portray Jonathan as

‘The messiah’ that will curb soaring high rates of unemployment, create job, businesses and enabling business environments for teeming jobless Nigerians. The denotative meaning in the visual of Figure 8 uses the PDP coloured attire to ascribe to him the status of a party chieftain. The agenda of the phrase ‘it is time to make progress’ meant his candidacy will open a new vista in the history of Nigeria. The slogan, ‘power to the people’ is the motto of the PDP, and was used to confer power to the delegates, by making them believe they hold the power to ‘decide’.

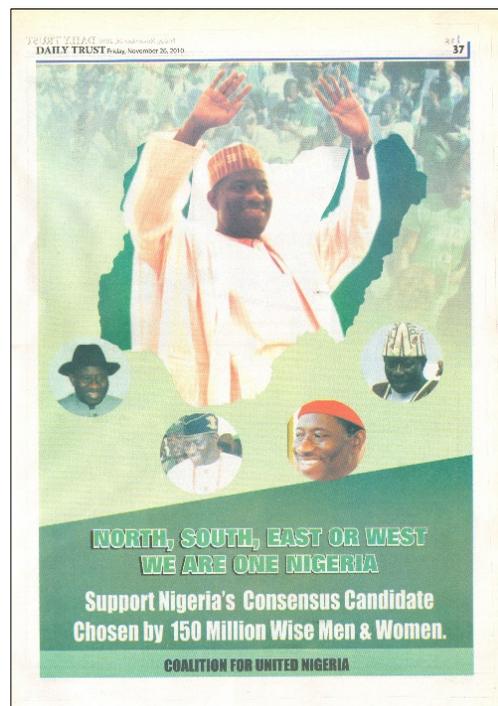


Figure 5. *Daily Trust*, November 26, 2010, p. 57



Figure 6. *The Guardian*, December 23, 2010, p. 57



Figure 7. *The Guardian*, December 14, 2010, p. 78

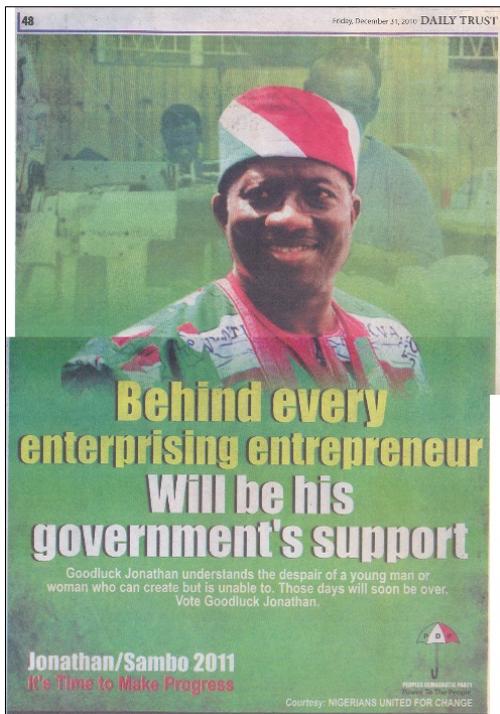


Figure 8. *Daily Trust*, December 31, 2010, 48

### Connotations from the Political ads

The rhetoric in the ads of Atiku sought to convince delegates to perceive him as the popular and most competent candidate. He was promoted as a visionary and patriotic leader who will promote infrastructural and economic development. Multitudes of traditional titles in his home state, Adamawa in Northern Nigeria and ethnic groups in other regions connoted endorsement by his people and diverse ethnic groups. This showed that Nigeria's diverse ethnicity bequeathed royal and ancestral rights and responsibilities on him. The use of Nigeria's second highest national honour (GCON – Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger), conferred on him when he

was vice president assigns to him a symbol of authority by the state and its constituent powers. In the Nigerian context, traditional attires are symbols of authority and convey the values and beliefs of a people. Dikko (2015) corroborates this position with evidence that costumes influence the status symbol of traditional title holders of Northern Nigeria.

Evidence for the preceding arguments can be exemplified with the photographs of Atiku in royal attires of diverse ethnic groups to symbolise various ethnic groups' conviction of his capacity to represent them. These invariably gave him their loyalty and support. The use of new media platforms, *Facebook* and *Twitter*, connotes that Atiku is a revolutionary and trendy leader, using technology for governance and development. The use of the PDP logo connotes endorsement by the party's high echelons.

The emphatic use of emerald green that Greer and Donica (2013, p. 191) argue symbolise hope, was used as a national symbol to appeal to delegates' patriotism. The assertion by Penn (2000) that green is the colour of life, renewal, nature, and energy, is synonymous here too for growth, harmony, freshness of ideas and purpose, security of lives and property and a promising future for Nigerians. Therefore, the bold emerald green letters connoted unity in diversity and prosperity. Furthermore, one of Atiku's ads focused on a five-point agenda: employment generation and wealth creation, power generation and infrastructure development, security, good governance and war against

corruption, education, health and social services, and the Niger Delta. These was based on Nigeria's development challenges to underscore his knowledge of Nigeria's bane of underdevelopment.

The electrified British building and street, and a photo of a student reading with a candle and rechargeable lantern compares progressive and retrogressive developments in the U.K. and Nigeria respectively. The brightly lit electric bulb symbolised hope and prosperity for Nigerians. The British and Nigerian flags, in circles, as well as the dates draw attention to milestones of historical accomplishments in the U.K. and in Nigeria way back in the colonial era, where in 1881, the U.K. had stable electricity and Nigeria's colonial capital, Lagos, enjoyed the same 15 years after in 1896. Atiku suggests he will reverse Nigeria's path and solve its electricity problems to create an enabling environment for development, industrialisation and economic prosperity. The super-imposed map of Nigeria, in white, over a semi-circle, in the emerald green of the Nigerian flag symbolises Nigeria's national identity. The slightly tilted half circle, like a rising sun, connotes a new dawn. The inscription, 'make good things happen', which was the slogan for Atiku's 2011 campaign, supports a new beginning and prosperity for Nigerians living in poverty. His charismatic photo and the phrases 'Vote wisely... Vote Atiku Abubakar for President', are closing ideas, which Axford (1997) argues are important for motivating an audience for immediate action.

Figure 4 shows that Atiku is an advocate of social equality, and metaphorically designated him to be a democrat whose leadership ideals represent fairness, equity, justice, inclusive governance, collective participation and judicious utilisation of public resources for collective interests. However, the crowd beneath the giant photo of Atiku failed to serve the intended purpose. Nonetheless, his giant photo on the miniaturised crowd weighs in and suggests he can ‘command’ the people. The Atiku campaign logo, unlike the slightly tilted half circle in Figure 3, appears as a full circle, connoting continuity.

Jonathan’s ads focused on development, participation, economic prosperity, unity, endorsement and negative propaganda to demonise Atiku as an advocate of doom and corruption. Jonathan was signified as a unifying personality who has the endorsement of Nigerians. This emphasises the indivisibility of Nigeria’s distinctive geographic entities. The consensus support by 150 million Nigerian ‘wise’ men and women is a veiled endorsement by most Nigerians.

Meanwhile, Jonathan is also dressed in attires of different major Nigerian ethnic groups, including a gigantic image in Northern Nigerian attire. His protruding giant image in Northern Nigerian attire from the map of Nigeria against his miniaturised ones in traditional attires of other major ethnic groups connotes his association with,

endorsement and preference by, the revered Northern Nigerian traditional institutions.

Furthermore, the bold inscriptions in Figure 8: ‘Behind every entrepreneur will be his government’s support’ meant that his government’s policy thrust will focus on job creation, industrialisation, improving standard of living and reducing unemployment. Meanwhile, the lead message printed in brilliant yellow suggests that his administration’s economic management and planning team have brilliant ideas to turn things around for Nigerian entrepreneurs. He is attired in PDP colours and a symbol to signify that he shall actuate the true sense of its slogan: *power to the people*. The faded background images of fashion designers signify a shift in the occupational outlook from the craze for certificates and white-collar jobs towards skilled labour and entrepreneurship. The attire also connotes a typical successful and rich Nigerian unlettered entrepreneur, whose trade-in-stock are to dress in flamboyant fabrics and colours. The *peacock* look makes him stick out in a crowd as he smiles to tell of his success. The slogan, ‘Jonathan/Sambo 2011... It’s time to make progress’ signifies that years of misrule were responsible for Nigeria’s stagnation and that Nigeria has all it takes to be a developed nation. The texts ‘Goodluck Jonathan understands the despair of a young man or woman who can create but is unable to’ empathically exploit the staggering unemployment rates among

Nigerian youths who are at least, one-third of the nation's population. The PDP slogan, 'power to the people', could also connote that his government will give priority to ordinary Nigerians<sup>2</sup>.

The negative propaganda against Atiku in ads sponsored by the Jonathan camp in Figures 6 and 7 portrayed Atiku as a demonic crusader of doom in an illuminating red robe, a silhouette trunk, a sword held high in his right hand, ready to strike with a bell in the left hand. On his neck is hung an inscription, 'apostle of violent change', written in a reverse white on black background. These are apostolic symbolic signification and indexical association within Peirce (1955's) trichotomies of signs. The symbol used the socially established convention of a priest to spread salvation. But, this red-robed priest spewed out the gospel of violence and blood-letting. Atiku, is then indexically associated to violence using red-letters in blurbs to quote aspects of a statement credited to Atiku and using gory pictures of war, maimed and charred human bodies, to associate violence with the red-robed human object representing Atiku. This subscribes to the observation by Jefkins (1992, p. 6) that the origin of propaganda is Catholic, and to missionary work, where priests propagated the gospel of Jesus. Meanwhile, as depicted in the political advertising among Nigerian

politicians, the modern use of the concept of propaganda is now broadly used to promote a negative cause.

Figure 7 used illustrations to establish Atiku's corrupt personality and the rhetorical question 'Coming to America?' to pre-empt his actions. The silhouette used Peirce (1955) trichotomies of signs to *iconise* Atiku as morally decadent and corrupt. The *desperado* label on his cap, scandals and corruption allegations on his body and bags are *indexes* to establish association between Atiku's attitudes and behaviors. The illustrations and the boxes, Trehan and Trehan (2006, pp. 120-122) note, are used in ads to increase attention of the audience towards specific portions of the texts. Figure 7 also refers to torrents of corruption allegations in hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars. Issuing him a red-card at a supposed U.S. entry point, is a *symbol*, using the socially established law from football to penalise him. The 'no entry' on the red card signifies Atiku is a *persona non-grata* in the U.S. However, the allegations are based on a U.S. Senate corruption indictment from statements of Senator Carl Levin of the US. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and not by a court of competent jurisdiction. The use of body text, to point to corruption allegations against Atiku, Trehan and Trehan (2006, p. 122) stresses is typical of print advertisement body copy, which persuades and influences. This is used to inform the PDP delegates that Atiku and his family are corrupt and that his family alongside his legal counsel are aiding and abetting his corrupt acts to make

<sup>2</sup>However, commentators argue that the PDP slogan is only a political gimmick to hoodwink the people when canvassing for support. The debilitating poverty conditions and the glaring disparity between politicians and the electorates are key indicators of such neglect.

the allegations credible and to establish that Atiku, his family, and confidants are untrustworthy.

## DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings from the denotative and connotative meanings in the political ads of the two contestants.

The denotative meanings were conveyed using linguistic and visual messages. The linguistic messages appeared in captions and labels using anchorage and relay to direct readers to preferred meanings and to strengthen the latter. The denotative signification in the visuals, for example, that signify the aspirants' endorsement by the traditional leadership and institutions across Nigeria's diverse ethnicities were an appeal to delegates' psychology, because Nigerians revere traditional beliefs and values and their custodians. The rhetoric was to make delegates think that a vote for either candidate is a vote representative of the diverse royal allegiances and constituents.

According to McCabe (2009), the common domain of the signified of connotation is an ideology. Hence, the following can be inferred. First, the connotational message in an image has multiple meanings, is not sacrosanct and depends on the body of knowledge within the viewer of the image. Therefore, whatever message the *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* conveyed in the ads of the two candidates, are subject to the preferred interpretations of their audiences, even though the attention of the reader may have been directed to a preferred reading. This was even more so

that McCabe (2009) and Barthes (1977) posit that the rhetoric of an image from the connotations may vary depending on the practical, national, cultural, aesthetic or any other knowledge that the reader possesses. Second, the media is a vehicle for conveying political agenda and ideology. McNair (2007) argues that the media provides a channel through which persuasive messages of political candidates and parties are conveyed to citizens using various elements, including political advertisements. The *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* were instruments in this regard in conveying the aspirants' persuasive messages on economic, political and social issues that were salient to Nigerians at the time.

However, within earlier arguments, ideologies are a shared framework of mental models possessed by groups to provide an interpretation of the environment and prescription of how to structure that environment according to Parsons (as cited in Jost et al., 2009). Ideologies also describe or interpret the world of possibilities, visualise an ideal world and specify acceptable means of attaining socioeconomic and political ideals (Jost et al., 2009).

The political ad of the two aspirants during the 2011 PDP presidential candidacy election, may have been a result of an intra-party-political process and therefore, a political group process. It however failed to prescribe specific framework of the party's public policies, and how the various elements of society would be organised to fulfil the needs and aspirations of Nigerians. It only succeeded in outlining salient

issues that affect the people. Therefore, the aspirants' rhetoric failed to prescribe a people-centred political ideology for their party even though the common domain of the signified connotations is ideology.

The findings provide empirical evidence to support commentaries by political analysts who comment that 'Nigerian political parties lack party ideology' (Musawa, 2014; Omotola, 2009). Furthermore, considering the current developmental frameworks in fast growing economies, especially in Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, in addition to the failures of established 'ideal' democracies, where (neo)liberalist and capitalist political ideologies had prescribed government policies that plunged nations into economic crises, it can be argued that the PDP, following its grip on the Nigerian political landscape for close to two decades need not confine itself to a particular political spectrum, but could have fused and prescribed contextually-appropriate political, social and economic frameworks that best suit the needs and aspirations of Nigerians. Omotola (2009) argue that in a democracy, party's political ideologies should drive towards positively improving the lives of the people rather than accepting rigidly defined political spectrum.

Interestingly, the death of President Yar'Adua, a Northern Nigerian, who was a founding member of the PDP and Nigeria's president in 2010, who spent three years of the North's tenure based on the party's rotational power agreement, created a vacuum and led to the power tussle between Nigeria's North and South. Atiku and

Jonathan represented these divides in the 2011 PDP presidential candidacy elections. Notably, both Atiku and Jonathan are also founding members of the PDP and Jonathan was at the time, the leader of the party and incumbent president.

Mudslinging and labelling Atiku as a corrupt leader and demon fits into the rhetorical context of findings by Iyengar and Prior (1999, pp. 3-4) that the most distinctive feature of contemporary political campaign advertisements is the negativity of their content and tone. However, the negative propaganda ads by Jonathan could have provided the rhetoric that described and prescribed a policy framework to remedy political pitfalls of corruption based on the allegations against Atiku. It could also have described how a Jonathan-led candidacy will recover and judiciously appropriate the alleged stolen funds, or prescribed how a Jonathan-candidacy would institute deterrent measures against future corrupt practices by political office holders. Instead, it chose to dwell on negative propaganda and ethnic sentiments. Atiku could also have used his agendas to describe how his government will organise the different sectors of the Nigerian state for the common good of the people. This corroborates assertions by Nwangwu and Ononogbu (2014) that Nigerian political elites manipulate the people with regional and ethnic prejudices to create barren development.

Furthermore, the findings infer interactions between ethnic alliances and media ownership influence on Nigerian

politics. The political adverts supporting Jonathan and demonising Atiku as an apostle of violence and a corrupt politician were found in the samples published by *The Guardian*. This may not exonerate *Daily Trust* from such practices since the samples analysed were limited to only the political advertising of the two candidates during the 2011 PDP candidate elections.

Instructively, *The Guardian* is an elite newspaper whose proprietors hail from an ethnic group from Delta State in Nigeria's Niger Delta. Jonathan is an ethnic Ijaw from Bayelsa State, also in Nigeria's Niger Delta. Historically, both Bayelsa and Delta states were part of the old Bendel State in Nigeria's era of 12-state structure from 1967 to 1976. Therefore, *The Guardian* could have accepted to publish negative propaganda advertisement as a strategic ploy to deter Atiku Abubakar from actualising the North's tenure considering that the Niger-Deltans and South-South jettisoned the PDP's South-North power sharing agreement during the 2011 presidential aspirants' elections because Atiku was the 'preferred candidate' of the Northern Nigerian political class. The negative ads against Atiku also suggested ethnic-aligned politics since Jonathan has ethnic ties with the publisher of *The Guardian*. This corroborates assertions by Ayeni (2011, p.51) that in Nigeria, party politics is still enmeshed in ethnic alliances. Nwangwu and Ononogbu (2014) add too, that Nigerian political elites display regional, ethnic and religious prejudices. Earlier discussions in this paper showed

that the PDP power sharing arrangement set the context for the power-tussle, and subsequently, some of the themes in the political ads of the two contestants.

Arguably, the ownership of *The Guardian* may be considered an ethnic minority, based on Nigeria's broad ethnic identities, however the negative political advertisements seeking to support an incumbent president to retain his office can significantly appease the political class aligned with the incumbent. It also significantly guarantees the protection of *The Guardian's* and its parent company's business interests and provides leverage and future patronages for their businesses considering the power of incumbency in Nigerian and African politics. This argument of serving its business interests is corroborated by Agbaje (as cited in Adesoji & Hahn, 2011) who assert that the Ibru family, who are the owners of *The Guardian*, get involved in politics ostensibly to safeguard their business interests.

It can also be argued that depicting both aspirants as the endorsed candidates of Northern Nigerians, and the appearance of most of the political advertisements in the *Daily Trust* newspaper is a deliberate attempt to use strategic media placements to placate Northern Nigerian political delegates and elites to allocate the Region's bloc votes to either of the contestants, because *Daily Trust* is the most widely read and circulated newspaper in Northern Nigeria and the newspaper's audience appeal is pro-Northern Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

This study showed that the print newspaper political ads in the 2011 presidential candidates of the PDP published in the *Daily Trust* and *The Guardian* newspapers conveyed denotative and connotative messages. The linguistic messages used anchorage and relay to direct the reader to preferred meanings and to add more meaning to a preferred one. The connotations from the ad visuals did not signify the party's ideology. Yet, ideology is the common domain of the signified in an advertising visual. This projects the PDP as a non-ideological political party, despite its role in defining Nigeria's nascent democracy. Additionally, business interests may also have been used to negotiate political power within Nigeria's multi-ethnic blocs considering the business interests of the publisher of *The Guardian*. The emphatic significations of Northern Nigerian political values in the political ads are direct attempts to woo the PDP Northern Nigerian political elites who have a grudge against the South for jettisoning the South-North power sharing arrangement.

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