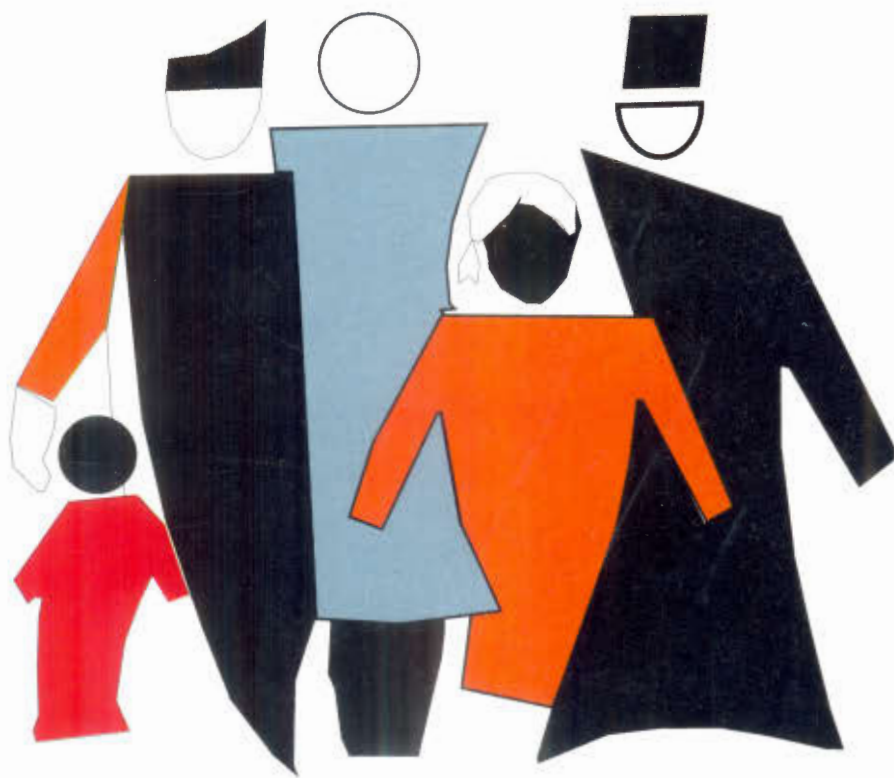


Malthouse

BEYOND FUN

MEDIA ENTERTAINMENT, POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA



Lai Oso
Rotimi Olatunji

Oladokun Omojola
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Beyond Fun

Media Entertainment, Politics and Development in Nigeria

Edited by

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Rotimi Olatunji
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Laughing into the Presidential Suites: a Content Analysis of the 2015 Nigerian Presidential Election Television Campaign Commercials

-Stella A. Aririguzoh & Amoka Eunice

Introduction

Presidential election campaign days are seasons of heightened expectations as political contenders try to grab public attention through the media, especially television. Election campaigns are deliberately organized by politicians, political parties and their supporters to influence the decisions the voters make in voting in or voting out specific individuals from public offices (Nimmo, 1970). It is literally impossible for presidential electoral contestants to talk to all the voters on one-on-one basis before the election dates. Therefore, most of them employ or contract some personnel with the knowledge, skills and professional credentials to produce slicks to carry their messages and hopeful promises to the members of the electorate through the television. Both popular and little known politicians have eagerly used it to court the electors. Kaid and Dimitrova (2005) claimed that television advertising was the battleground in the United States' 2004 presidential election. Television also became the battleground in the 2015 Nigerian presidential election. National television airs commercials that are watched by thousands of viewers. Aririguzoh (2014, p. 18) also points out that "television has played various roles in presidential elections, as voters may not actually know a candidate beyond what they have read or heard about him." It would be most difficult for all the voters to know all the contestants as individuals or even have the opportunities of meeting them. Most of what they know about the contestants is gleaned from media reports. One of the ways that contestants make themselves known to these voters is through public television advertisements designed to sell them to the voting public. Just, Crigler and Wallach (1990) write that advertisements can educate the public and would be voters about the political candidates and the issues at stake during campaigns. Naturally, politicians assume that the more these voters see them on television, the more they are likely to be more familiar with their aspirations.

Electoral campaign messages market political candidates to those who are to choose from a number of other contestants (Bartels, 1993). Opposition contestants, at times, have intimidating credentials and apparently, abundance of financial resources. To divert attention from opposing contestants and rivet it to their specific candidates, campaign managers now produce amusing spots or advertisements that grab the

attention of the viewers (Atkin and Heald, 1976; Prior, 2005). Entertaining political television commercials snap public attention by providing amusement, fun, excitement and performances. The serious business of politics becomes entertainment. While television viewers enjoy the free and pleasurable entertainment, media directors silently pray that their carefully crafted campaign messages are remembered and their employees get the votes (Freedman, Franz and Goldstein, 2004; Norris and Sanders, 2003). In fact, most viewers still revel in the enjoyment of watching the various presidential spots. This paper seeks to expand knowledge on political advertisement by examining the entertainment elements employed in the 2015 Nigerian presidential election.

Background to the study

Political marketing are efforts of political actors to gain upper hands in relating with the electorate, especially during electoral campaigns (Lock & Harris, 1996; O'Cass, 1996). The presidential election attracts more attention than others because the winner becomes the number one citizen of the nation. Voters are expected to make informed choices to decide who the next president would be. Advertising on television is seen as a practical necessity to secure this exalted seat. Necessity is therefore laid on the contestants, their political parties, media managers and all who are sympathetic to their causes to draw the attention of the voters to their causes. Presidential election campaigns help politicians to educate voters and possibly win the elections.

Television is an effective channel of political communication and provides a passage for advertisers to reach the voting public. Particularly in a Nigerian presidential election, Aririguzoh (2015) finds that television broadcasts do influence the political participation of the viewers; improve their political knowledge (2011); influence their choices of political parties (2012); the candidates they vote for (2014b); or even cause them to change their minds from the initial candidates that they had earlier wanted to vote for other candidates (2011b).

The 2015 Nigerian presidential election featured 26 registered political parties with only four teen of them submitting names of their presidential candidates (http://www.inecnigeria.org/?page_id=3508). It became a contest between two giants: the then incumbent president, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the present one, Retired General Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC). The now elected Buhari represented a coalition of the major opposition parties. The other contestants in the other parties were silenced by the trumpeting sounds of the two giant elephants. Jonathan hinged his campaign messages on the various achievements that he recorded during his tenure and asked Nigerians to re-elect him to continue his good works. His re-election campaign team, *The Transformation Agents of Nigeria* (TAN) chanted his achievements in the key sectors of agriculture, transport, aviation, education, sports, roads and oil and gas. Buhari's *Change Agents for Nigeria* (CAN) charged Nigerians to vote out Jonathan for a change.

These two contestants and their supporters took their contentions to the public through the television as slick spots with a lot of entertaining features. Indeed, the 2015 Nigerian presidential election may have come and gone as the proclaimed winner has since laughed his way into the presidential suite and assumed duties in his new office. Nevertheless, Nigerians are still reeling with the excitement of the amusement they brought. This paper examines the entertainment values of these spots.

Statement of problem

The primary functions of the media are education, information and entertainment. The entertainment function provides an escapist and pleasurable route for media content consumers to relax from their routine activities. This function of the media is fulfilled when the messages attract, engage and keep the attention of the reader or viewer by being funny, amusing, and fascinating. Media consumers are exposed to diverse media channels. Staying to be entertained requires the time of the consumer. Politicians have engaged entertainment in building presidential spots". Television is an audiovisual medium. The many versions of the 2015 Nigerian presidential campaign television commercials provided hilarious entertainment to many television viewers. Because there were many gladiators in the political arena, resourceful campaign handlers deliberately crafted messages to grab public attention by what they said and how they said it. The entertainment variables make the advertisements stand out as well as make the messages of the politicians different from those of other contenders. Television and politics become forms of entertainment to the viewers. It is a common assumption that what is different is more easily noticed. The vicarious experience of reliving a specific message is hopefully associated to the message. The messages of the politicians were just two: *vote for us* and *do not vote for the opposition*.

Entertainment has been introduced into television electioneering to make political advertisements exceptional more exciting and force the viewers to relax their moods. They are constructed to be fun-filled. This paper seeks to content analyze the entertainment factors embedded in the 2015 Nigerian presidential election.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to find out how entertainment factors were used in the Nigerian 2015 presidential advertisements. The specific objectives are to:

1. Define the entertainment forms used in presenting the presidential campaign commercials
2. Find out the entertainment elements employed in the presidential campaign spots
3. Define how entertainment was presented in the presidential campaign spots

Research questions

1. What are the forms of entertainment used in the presidential campaign commercials?
2. What are the entertainment factors used in the presidential campaign commercials?
3. How were the entertainment components in the presidential campaign commercials arranged?

Literature Review

It is not unusual for political communicators to engage the use of marketing tools to draw attention to them and to what they think that they can offer. Advertising is a popular marketing tool used to create awareness. Political communicators use advertising to draw the attention of the voters to their ideologies. Kaid (2004, p. 155) is of the position that political advertising has evolved into the dominant form of communication between candidates and voters in democracies around the world. In addition, Kelley

(1962, p. 307), Edegoh, Ezebuonyi and Asemah (2013, p. 375) observe that advertising plays an important role in the electoral process. The authors assert that political advertisements make it possible for politicians to reach more people faster and cheaper.

Fourie (2013) observes that political advertisements perform three functions: provide a platform for citizens to evaluate candidates running for public offices; allow politicians access to more audience than they would typically have received and afford them opportunities to shape citizens' political views about their party and themselves. Adding to this discourse are Freedman, Fraz and Godstein (2004, p. 723) who claim that political advertising provides informational and emotional contents that produce citizens who are more interested in the election; have more to say about the candidates; are more familiar with who is running; and are more likely to vote. Nevertheless, Scammell and Langer (2006) share the opinion that political advertising is the most disdained form of political communication possibly because it has "wedded to information and plausibility". The dislike might arise from the acerbic nature of the majority of political adverts today. Postman (2005) supports the opinion that television is destroying politics and public discourse. Although Jones (2009) recognizes that television can trivialize politics, lead to a loss of seriousness as well as spread ignorance, yet he writes that *Entertaining Politics* is here to stay and therefore must be taken seriously. Vreese and Elenbaas (2011, p.70) point out that the "growing diversity in the media environment is increasing polarization in the electorate and reducing the impact of presidential communications.

Sir Francis Bacon (1626) defined the word *entertain* to mean *amuse*. **Entertainment** involves activities that permit people to amuse themselves by providing fun, enjoyment and laughter. Popular entertainment forms include storytelling, music, drama, dance and diverse performances. Entertainment plays the very important role of making citizens to appreciate and understand politics. Staid political messages are presented in humorous ways to make voters be amused. As Xenos and Becker (2009) have found, voters' exposure to political entertainment makes them seek for more information. Politicians and their media managers produce entertaining television advertisements coupled with information about the contestant. Nabi (2007) says that humorous messages are more memorable and make viewers to go into deep and prolonged thinking.

Bakare (2008, p.65) writes that advertising messages primarily communicate information. However, these pieces of information sometimes provide entertainment, motivation and fascination to the target audience. Jamieson (2000, p.96) claims that campaign advertisements are linked to increased voter turnout for elections. Although television campaigns provide the voters with the visual images of the contestants, (p.298) he points out that televised presidential advertising is not the best option for the discussion of complex issues or details of policy concerns because advertisements are image and not knowledge based. Scheuer (2008, p.121) observes that television is associated with action, immediacy, specificity, and certainty. Jones (2009) notes the role of entertainment programming in public discourse on politics. Gregorowicz (2013, p.156) concludes that political comedy is emerging as an important source of political information, especially for the younger people. He observes (p. 177):

that humour has been used to pass across political messages since the days of ancient Greece. Moy, Xenos and Hussain (2013) write that several

forms of media content shape persons' political behaviours. They found that political entertainment content provides the people different angles about politics. Nevertheless, Delli Carpini (2017) argues that "politics," "political engagement," "political effects," and "politically relevant media" are socially constructed. Yatsunskaya (2015) relates how television political advertisements in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election campaign not only sustained political myths but also created new ones.

Theoretical framework

Stephenson's (1964) play theory posits that people use the mass media primarily for play and not for work or as reputable sources of information. In other words, people use the media for entertainment: pleasure, self-satisfaction, relaxation or just to fill time. This theory is based on the ideal that the media have limited harmful effects because their users use their contents for entertainment and that the entertainment embedded in the media messages would reduce anxiety in our lives. Media contents such as soap operas, movies, or radio shows help to entertain the people and take their attention away from stress. According to this theory, entertainment is an end in itself. This confirms Katz, Gurevitch and Haas's (1973) finding that people use the media for escape and diversion or to release tension.

Stephenson (1967) writes that play and work are not the same. The first is a break from work and engaged in largely for self-satisfaction. People work to earn a living by producing goods and services. Nevertheless, work and play are subject to either converging or diverging control. Control converges when the individual makes the choice of behaviour. It diverges when the society makes the choice for the individual. Consequently, what is classified as play is influenced by the society and individual choices. People maximize their communication pleasure by choosing what they think will entertain them. Stephenson is of the opinion that communication produces pain and pleasure with the pain coming from work: production, education and development of skills. The pleasure comes from entertainment: enjoyment, contentment and delight. Ordinarily, play is an action pursued for pleasure. People may turn to the mass media after work to be entertained to take their minds away from anxiety.

Playfulness is often associated with childhood. Therefore, when an adult plays around, he is seen as undependable, irresponsible, immature and even foolish. Sutton-Smith (2008, p. 95) writes that play "... is not just fun, not just pleasurable for its own sake. Play's positive pleasure typically transfers to our feelings about the rest of our everyday existence and makes it possible to live more fully in the world, no matter how boring or painful or even dangerous ordinary reality might seem." He (p.82) adds that play forms "... a set of positive verbal images and representations and even fantasies." Similarly, Huizinga (1955, p.13) describes play as "a free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it The function of play in the higher forms which concern us here can largely be derived from the two basic aspects under which we meet it: as a contest for something or a representation of something.

These two functions can unite in such a way that the game "represents" a contest, or else becomes a contest for the best. Ghiglione (1988, p.53) therefore declares that

“communicating is a game which sets the stakes which the interlocutors play for according to principles, rules and regulations, whose substratum can be found in the stability of the interlocutors with regard to a single aim: attempt to act upon the other according to the structure of a possible world.” It is therefore not surprising that designers of campaign messages have creatively used the idea of entertainment to craft compelling messages to help to sell their candidates. The 2015 Nigerian presidential election television commercials were no children’s play. But the play virtues were deployed as important forms of expression to pass across the serious messages of the contenders.

However, Akinjogbin and Kayode (2011) have criticised Stephenson’s play theory of mass communication as outdated. They say his theses may have held true in traditional societies where the people had lower levels of education, were fewer in number; and had fewer needs. According to them new communication technology, new media and globalization of information have made production and consumption of information to move away from the confines of entertainment. Media messages can now be used for both play and work.

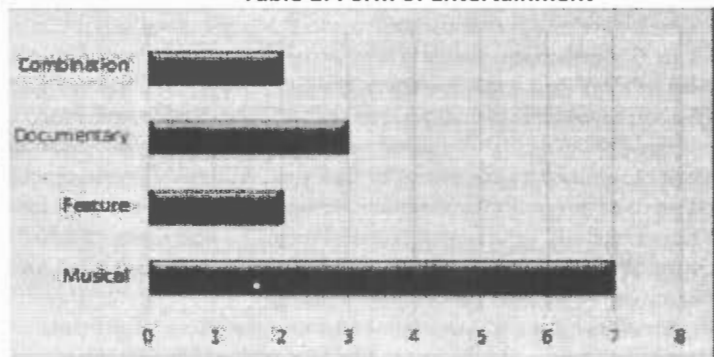
Research methodology

Content analysis was the research method adopted in study. A content analytical study creates room for the objective evaluation of various aspects of a text According to Sobowale (1983, p. 18), it is the method used to examine what is already published and from these draw necessary conclusions. The units of analysis in this study are presentation styles, arrangement of the entertaining elements, entertainment factors used and the emotions these presidential spots aroused. The coding sheet was the instrument of data collection. Fourteen of the presidential television advertisements were used in this study. The advertisements were a mix of those sponsored from the stables of ex-president Jonathan Goodluck and his Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) and the now president, Muhammadu Buhari and his All Progressive Congress (APC). Incidentally, the other contestants did not engage in television electioneering. The messages of the commercials hinged around security, terrorism, continuity and the need for change.

Data Presentation and Interpretation

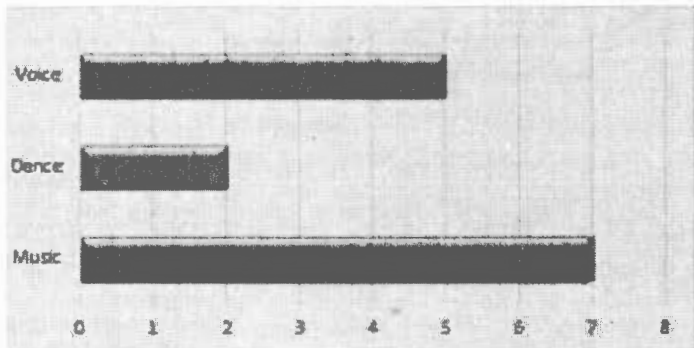
Below are the primary data generated from the coding sheet for this study.

Table 1: Form of Entertainment



The most common form or style of presenting the entertainment in the advertisements was musical: artistic singing, beating of instruments and dancing in a pleasing way. In fact, half of the commercials were so presented. The two All Progressives Congress (APC) campaign commercial marketing Buhari for presidency were presented as songs. The popular One Man Song was sang by a popular rapper named Olamide Adeniyi popularly identified as *Badoo*. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presented six of its campaign messages as songs. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's names were sang as songs for example in his party's campaign commercial and the *Goodluck Sit Down* spot. Music is a prominent aspect of Nigerian culture and richly expresses the way of life of the people from the different ethnic communities. It is not surprising that campaign messages were packaged as musicals which are reflective of the routine lives of the voters that the candidates are trying to reach. Many people use it to express their sorrow or joy; philosophies; ideas and even fears. Music is relaxing to the listener especially when the songs are melodious. The music type most used was rhythm and blues. The musical form was followed by features and documentaries. The features presented the messages of the presidential campaigns as short mini-films with the cast acting out their assigned roles. Their story lines were the imaginations of the script writers. Nigerians watch home videos and indeed the country is among the first three world producers of films. Two APC spots told voters to vote in their presidential candidate so that he could stamp out abductors and terrorists: a veiled allusion to the then Goodluck Jonathan's regime's inability to wipe out Boko Haram terrorists who abducted more than 200 school girls in Chibok in 2014. One of the documentaries showed non-fiction clips of Goodluck been compared with other world leaders like Mandela, Obama and Martin Luther kind who did not find it easy crusading for changes in their different countries. Some of the messages combined characteristics of the previous three. Two of these are *I believe in Goodluck* and *I am Goodluck Jonathan* with the latter telling the classical story of grass to grace.

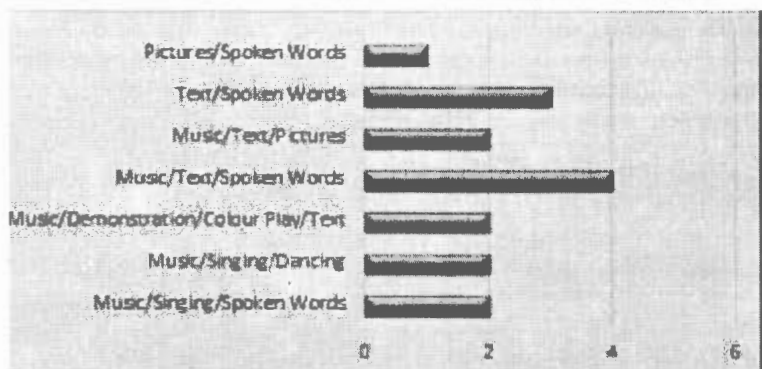
Table 2: Major entertainment elements used



The most common entertainment element used in the campaign spots was music: used to eulogize the contestants for their past good deeds and their promises of what they would do if elected into office again. Both APC and PDP spots advertising Buhari and Goodluck respectively as presidential candidates came as theme music. Goodluck

further employed music as his major element in telling his stories for continuity. *I believe in Goodluck*, *Goodluck Sit Down* and *Best Goodluck Jonathan* campaign videos were musical pieces. Dancing is a demonstrative form of communication. Dancing is the rhythmic movement of the body according to the music. The common dance steps are mostly indigenous. The participants showed off comical but exaggerated dances for example in *Goodluck Sit down (Official Campaign Music Video)* where comedian Godwin Komone popularly known as *Gordons* displayed some funny dance steps. His bright red but tight shirt struggled with his protruding stomach as he danced away happily. The other dancers' colourful dresses also added to the funfare. Of course, human voices deliberately conveying specific messages in English and the major Nigerian languages added to the entertainment. For example, the male voice that told viewers in the *Goodluck Jonathan Campaign Song* that Goodluck is 'answering a call from the fatherland' and that he is 'the man that is right' for the presidential office could possibly make viewers laugh. Even more hilarious is the assertion in the *Goodluck Sit down* spot that the presidential seat is his and that he must be president till 2019! Another declared him the winner before the election was even held. In the *I am Goodluck Jonathan* spot, the words "I have no shoes...", "no car to take me to school...", if I can make it, you can make it were deliberately crafted to uplift the spirit of the voters to believe that their routine lives can be miraculously changed over night. Buhari's campaign song that he is 'one man to lead us to the promised land' and 'ready to fight for what is right' adds to the drama. This means that makers of political contest videos should lay more emphasis in packaging the messages of their employers as musicals, preferable the ones that can be danced to. They should also use very catchy words like *I believe in Goodluck Jonathan* that viewers can easily recall.

Table 3: Presentation of Entertainment Elements



The entertainment elements packaged in the spots were presented to the voters mostly as music combined with other factors like text, demonstrations, dance and voice all rolled into one. The most popular arrangement was the combination of music, text and spoken words. This was followed by music, text and spoken words. In *I believe in Goodluck Jonathan*, some popular Nollywood artistes like Duru Francis (lead character in the blockbuster, *Rattle Snake*), Tony Umez, Desmond Elliot and Yul Edochie and Nigerian musicians like Daddy Showkey and Kcee put on colourful costumes to sing and

dance in such uproarious manners. Others played on colours by painting their bodies in the national colours, having different colours of light reflect on them or even writing out their messages about the candidate/party being advertised. The *APC Presidential Brand* also played with two shades of blue.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended.

1. The messages of presidential elections carry the grave messages of the contestants to lure voters to their sides. Nevertheless, these messages should be presented in very amusing ways. Very serious messages may turn away the attention of the voters. Humorous presentations would help the viewers to comprehend and possibly retain the basic messages from the contestants.
2. Music is a prominent part of Nigerian culture. Therefore, the designers of presidential political messages should present them as musicals. Music appeals to both the old and the young.
3. Importantly, they should use indigenous and popular artistes that members of the electorate can relate with. Popular Nollywood actors and singers should be drafted into their performance.
4. Television election campaigners should encapsulate their basic messages as a music that can be danced to, be easily remembered and hummed along just to catch the attention of the voters.
5. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should produce and air messages presented as music, dance, demonstration, and voice manipulations to draw the attention of voters to participate in presidential elections.
6. While messages on presidential elections are packaged as musicals, the other ingredients of text, intonation and demonstration should be incorporated

Conclusion

Presidential campaign messages are crafted to lure voters to favour or disfavour a particular contestant and/or political party. Candidates, their political parties and their supporters produce spots that they hope would catch the attention of the voters and make them to cast their votes in their favour. Since it is impossible for contestants to meet all the voters on an individual basis, the campaigners take to television to display their messages. These messages are presented in forms that entertain the viewers. Major entertainment elements like music and dance are packaged as songs or mini-films and aired to the audience. The grave messages of potential presidents should be presented in a light hearted manner to catch the attention of the voters. To catch and arrest viewers' attention in a media saturated environment with over-abundance of messages of all kinds. It is necessary to package these peculiar messages and present them as entertaining songs, music or dance. Since these elements are part of the Nigerian culture, aspirants might reach the voters more quickly with their messages. In conclusion, Stephenson's postulations that people use the media for entertainment seems valid judging by the way presidential campaign spot feature in a lot of entertainment.

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