

Political Branding In Campaign Commercials In The 2023 Governorship Elections In Rivers State, Nigeria

Kasarachi Hayford Innocent^{1*} Success Michael²

1. Department of Broadcasting, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, University of Port Harcourt
2. Department of Linguistics & Communication Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt

* E-mail of the corresponding author: kasarachi.innocent@uniport.edu.ng

Abstract

A key feature of political campaigns is political advertising, which uses political branding as a tool. The 2023 elections in Nigeria witnessed a high use of campaign jingles or commercials and since these messages aimed to sway voters, there is the need to analyse their contents. Using branding and framing theories as pegs, this study therefore examined political branding in campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State, Nigeria. Four research questions with four hypotheses guided the study. Employing content analysis, the study used availability and census sampling techniques to analyse 35 political commercials drawn from the campaigns. The validity of the code sheet was established via face validity method while the Cronbach Alpha method was used to establish its reliability index with a score of 0.82. Simple percentage method was used to answer research questions while Chi-Square was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 significance level. Among other findings, the results indicate low level use of campaign branding by political parties in the election; significant relationships among the branding elements and messaging techniques employed in campaign commercials; and notable variations in the messaging themes employed by the different political parties. The study concludes that the political parties in the 2023 governorship election in Rivers State lacked competence in the branding process hence, their messages were disjointed and lacked consistency and personality. It was recommended that political parties in Nigeria should invest in consistent and strategic branding to sell their candidates and strengthen democracy in the country. The National Independent Electoral Commission should create a department to check negative branding that borders on defamation, in campaign commercials.

Keywords: 2023 elections, commercials, campaigns, political branding, candidates, Rivers State

DOI: 10.7176/JMCR/94-07

Publication date: March 30th 2025

1. Introduction

Political communication is not entirely novel to the conceptual framework of branding. Over the last 20 years or so, political actors and political parties have frequently used brand management insights and even personnel to improve their external appearance and appeal (Speed, Butler & Collins (2015). In Nigeria, political branding advertisements have had a big impact on how political campaigns are run and how the public views leaders (Okpara, Anuforo & Achor, 2016). Although political branding advertisements are not new, Nigeria has seen a clear development in this area of political communication beginning with a rise in political branding advertisements during the era of transition from military to civilian rule in 1999. At this time, television commercials were used by the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which controlled the political scene, to spread political messages (Opeibi, 2009). According to Opeibi (2009), for widespread appeal, the party used well-known politicians and catchy phrases. For instance, Olusegun Obasanjo, a former president, started the "Rebranding Nigeria" campaign during the 2003 elections which aimed at enhancing Nigeria's reputation domestically and internationally (Opeibi, 2009). The 2015 elections saw the All Progressives Congress sweep into power over the incumbent PDP on the carefully-crafted brand mantra of 'Change' which emphasised promises of better government and the eradication of corruption. In the 2023 national elections, the same APC branded its candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, with the mantra of 'Renewed Hope.'

Campaign commercials serve multiple purposes, including shaping public perception, mobilising support, and differentiating candidates from their opponents. Nwachukwu, Achor, Nkwocha & Okwara (2016) highlight how these commercials are meticulously crafted to convey specific messages and evoke emotional responses from viewers. Through the strategic use of imagery, slogans, and narrative techniques, candidates aim to establish a

distinct identity and forge personal connections with voters (Speed, Butler & Collins, 2015). This is particularly pertinent in regions like Rivers State, characterised by intense competition and ethnic diversity, where political branding plays a pivotal role in influencing voter behaviour (Undende, 2011). Effectiveness in political branding through campaign commercials hinges on several factors, including message clarity, audience resonance, and media saturation (Nwachukwu, Achor, Nkwocha & Okwara (2016). Nwachukwu (2019) suggests that voters in Rivers State are highly receptive to commercials that resonate with their experiences and address pressing socio-economic issues. Moreover, the pervasiveness of social media has expanded the reach of these commercials, enabling candidates to engage with voters directly and in real-time. This notwithstanding, credibility and authenticity remain crucial, as observed by Osoba (2021), with voters in Rivers State being discerning and quick to scrutinise the integrity of political aspirants.

Generally, political branding draws from political science, communication studies, marketing, and psychology to create messages that will position candidates and parties as better than others in the minds of potential voters. Today, candidates have more possibilities than ever to advertise to potential voters because of the growth of social media and television. Given these recent developments, parties and candidates have the chance to reach larger as well as specialized audiences. Building on this, candidates leverage on slogans, logos, colours, graphics, and messaging techniques to construct a distinctive brand identity that captures their beliefs, character, and policy preferences, and increase their identification and familiarity with voters as well as foster a sense of trust and dependability by employing consistent branding in their campaign materials. However, not all branding is effective; in fact some can backfire negatively. Negative branding through conveyance of false perceptions to voters in an effort to gain their favour or garner their interest, can turn voters off and damage a candidate's reputation (Nwachukwu, Achor, Nkwocha & Okwara, 2016). Again, different demographic groups may respond differently to different types of branding, so candidates must tailor their approach to appeal to their target audiences.

The concept of branding in political campaigns extends beyond mere logo design or slogans; it encompasses the deliberate construction and dissemination of a distinct identity resonating with target audiences. West, Orman and Brown (2021) argue that effective political branding entails strategic alignment of messaging, imagery, and values, to cultivate emotional connections and foster voter loyalty. In the context of Rivers State's governorship elections in 2023, political parties recognised the imperative for crafting compelling brand narratives to differentiate themselves and sway public opinion in their favour. One fundamental branding element observed in campaign commercials is narrative framing, strategically employed by parties to articulate a vision for the future while framing opponents unfavourably (Akhmad & Azhar, 2015). Symbolism and imagery therefore emerge as powerful tools to evoke emotional responses and convey nuanced messages, as Fan (2019) suggests. Additionally, consistency and repetition of key messages reinforce brand associations (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2019).

Several empirical studies such as Adebowale and Ahmed (2021), Okoro and Okafor (2020), and Ibrahim and Yusuf (2018) emphasise the significance of visual symbolism, credibility, and messaging effectiveness in campaign commercials. Additionally, the utilisation of online platforms like *Facebook* and *X (Twitter)* has become increasingly prevalent, particularly among younger demographics and urban voters. In tandem with the above claims, Basil & Matthes (2010) had argued that a deeper emotional connection can be established with the audience through the use of narratives, visual imagery, music, and the personal tales of party leaders or followers. Baines *et al.*, (2019) whose research find that political parties use verbal aspects like slogans and messages along with visual elements like logos, colours, and symbols, in an effort to create a distinct and recognisable brand identity that appeals to their target audiences. The authors also maintain that campaign advertisements have a substantial impact on brand loyalty by repeating good associations, upholding a positive brand image in voters' thoughts, and generating steadfast support. Also Aaker (n.d) cited in Isabel *et al* (2016), argues that brand identity encompasses the unique attributes, values, and characteristics that define a brand. On their part, West & Turner (2017) hold that campaign commercials play a crucial role in communicating and reinforcing these points of differentiation as posited by Isabel *et al* (2016), through persuasive storytelling, compelling visuals, and memorable messaging. Emotional branding, Govers & Go (2009), is another vital component of branding theory. However, campaign commercials serve as battlegrounds where political actors vie for attention, credibility, and electoral support, and they do this by employing a diverse range of messaging techniques to resonate with voters and secure victory. It is against this backdrop that this study was undertaken to analyse empirically, the contents, techniques and strategies employed by the various political parties and candidates in Rivers State, Nigeria, in campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship election in the state.

2. Statement of Problem

The core problem of this study is the seeming lack of or inadequate knowledge as it relates to the precise branding strategies employed by particular political parties in their campaign commercials during the 2023 Rivers State governorship election. Despite the importance of political branding in influencing electoral outcomes, available data suggest a lack of systematic analysis of how political parties and candidates utilised this critical component of the electioneering process in the governorship in Rivers State in 2023. By analysing the essential components and techniques used in the political campaign commercials for branding by selected parties, this study aimed to fill this gap in the literature. Specifically, the study focused on analysing systematically, how the political commercials' employed and projected visual design, messaging strategies, emotional appeals, and candidate image development in the message delivery. The dearth of empirical studies on this subject is imbued with several challenges for different facets of societal life, and in particular, political development in the Nigerian society. First, political parties may find it difficult to convey their positions and philosophies as well as engaging effectively with the electorate without a systematic understanding of the branding strategies that best suit such particular electorates and the segments that constitute them. Second, it is difficult to create focused campaign strategies that connect with the audience in the absence of knowledge about how these advertisements influence or shape voter attitudes and behaviour. The study also offers insight into how well political branding works to sway voter opinions, a factor which is important for political parties and candidates to evaluate and improve their campaign methods against the background of the role of political branding in campaign commercials as tools for communicating candidates or party messages to voters in Rivers State.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What were the key branding elements employed in the campaign commercials of the selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State?

RQ2: What were the messaging techniques used in the campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State?

RQ3: How were the candidates' images constructed in the campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State?

RQ4: What messaging themes were employed by the political parties in their campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State?

4. Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the key branding elements employed in the campaign commercials among the selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the messaging techniques used in the campaign commercials among the selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Ho₃: There is no significant difference in the candidates' images constructed in the campaign commercials among the selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Ho₄: There is no significant difference in the messaging themes employed by the different political parties in their campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

5. Theoretical framework

5.1 Branding Theory

Branding theory provides an in-depth structure that explains the strategic development and management of brand identities which apply to political parties seeking to shape public perceptions and attract voter support. Aaker (1996) as cited by Isabel *et al* (2016), claims that brand identity encompasses the unique attributes, values, and characteristics that define a brand. In the context of political parties, brand identity encompasses the party's core ideology, policy positions, historical legacy, and overall image (Baines *et al.*, 2019). Keller (2008) argues that differentiation is a key component of branding theory. It entails showcasing special traits or characteristics that set a brand as different from its rivals. Campaign commercials play a crucial role in communicating and

reinforcing these points of differentiation through persuasive storytelling, compelling visuals, and memorable messaging (West & Turner, 2017). Emotional branding, according to Govers & Go (2009), is another vital component of branding theory. Recognising that human decision-making is frequently influenced by emotions rather than purely rationality, branding tries to create an emotional bond between the brand and its target audience. In order to appeal to specific emotions that resonate with voters' aspirations, values, and concerns, such as optimism, pride, fear, or empathy, political parties use emotive techniques in their advertising.

Brand loyalty is the level of commitment, trust, and support that people have for a brand. It is a crucial goal for both commercial and political brands. Brand loyalty in politics translates into support for a certain political party and voter loyalty. By maintaining involvement, using a consistent message, and keeping their campaign pledges to supporters, political parties want to build brand loyalty (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Campaign advertisements have a substantial impact on brand loyalty by repeating good associations, upholding a positive brand image in voters' thoughts, and generating steadfast support (Baines *et al.*, 2019).

5.2 Framing Theory

According to Entman (1993), 'To frame is to highlight some characteristics of a seen reality in a communicative text in order to support a specific issue description, causal interpretation, moral judgment, and/or therapeutic prescription for the item described' (p.51). In place of terminology like frame of reference, context, topic, and news angle, the concept of a frame has been utilised widely and indiscriminately in regard to news as mentioned in (Bossey & Asemah, 2021). According to framing theory, the way messages are presented to audiences by the media affects the decisions they make about how to digest the information they are given (Asemah, 2022). Thus, framing theory is a philosophical hypothesis that helps with the coverage of media stories by explaining how news content is often moulded and contextualised by journalists (McQuail, 2005 as cited in Aigbefoh & Asemah, 2021).

6. Political Branding

The political branding is a powerful and attractive tool for understanding political images. According to Scammell (2014), branding has the potential to unify the rational and emotional aspects of political behaviour. As a concept, political branding refers to the strategic process of developing and managing the image, perception, and reputation of a political party, candidate, or political ideology (Akhmad & Azhar, 2015). It involves the application of branding principles and techniques to shape public opinion, attract and mobilise supporters, and differentiate one political entity from others. Political branding aims to establish a distinct identity and narrative for a political party or candidate that resonates with the target audience. It includes a variety of components, including messaging, slogans, symbols, visual identity, and an overarching communication strategy. The goal is to leave a favourable and lasting impression, establish credibility and trust, and affect voter perceptions and behaviours.

Again, political branding entails creating a distinctive and alluring narrative that conveys a party's principles, stances, and future goals. It might entail creating catchphrases and slogans that succinctly express the party's main points and appeal to voters. Visual components like logos, colours, and design are essential for building brand recognition and preserving identity. Building an emotional connection with the electorate is the goal of successful political branding. It aids in setting a political party apart from its competitors, establishing it as the obvious choice, and developing a solid reputation. An effective political branding strategy can affect voter perception, shape public opinion, and affect election results.

According to Scammell (2014), a brand in the sense of political branding represents the reputation and general appearance of a political entity. It refers to "political representations situated in a pattern, which can be identified and differentiated from other political representations" (Nielsen, 2016). Political brands can be viewed as a complex with three separate aspects, viz: "the party as a brand; the politician as his tangible characteristics; and politics as basic service offerings" (Smith & French, 2009: p. 212).

Political brand strategy refers to methods used by a political party or candidate to create, maintain, and advance their brand identity. It entails a series of calculated choices and deeds meant to sway public opinion, cultivate confidence, and elicit support (Okpara, Anuforo & Achor, 2016). It includes components such as: brand positioning, target audience analysis, messaging and communication strategy, visual identity development, digital presence and social media strategy, campaign collateral and events, reputation management, grassroots mobilisation, continuous evaluation and adaptation, brand consistency and authenticity, name, symbol, and slogan, etc.

7. Building Identity and Differentiation

Building a distinctive character and distinctiveness is at the heart of political branding. Political parties and candidates work to create a distinct identity that sets them apart from rivals (Kotler *et al.*, 2002). This entails identifying their beliefs, principles, opinions on issues, and leadership traits that set them apart from other candidates and make them appealing to particular voter demographics (Akhmad & Azhar, 2015). To stand out in a crowded political field and win voters' support, parties must emphasise their distinctive features and offerings (Pich & Newman, 2019).

Building brand identity and differentiation involves intentionally employing the following factors: Personality and leadership - highlighting and emphasising particular qualities like integrity, charm, or experience of candidates (Fan, 2006); symbolism and visual identity – using logos, colours, and symbols (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012); messaging and communication style – using voice, vocabulary, and framing employed in speeches and campaign literature (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013); emotional connection and trust - creating uplifting emotions like trust, hope, and zeal (Fan, 2014); consistency and coherence - ensuring that branding components are applied consistently across a variety of campaign materials and platforms (Parmelee & Bichard, 2012); context and audience adaptation – adapting branding techniques to reflect local, cultural, and socio-political elements (Grafström & Rehnberg, 2022); image management and perception - controlling the narrative and influencing how candidates are seen by the general public through managing media coverage, public appearances, and messages (Pich & Newman, 2019).

8. Political Branding and Voter Behaviour

Political branding has been documented to significantly impact voter choices and behaviour (Akhmad & Azhar, 2015)). As Gidengil *et al.* (2016), posit, from political branding, voters frequently acquire opinions of political parties and candidates. A well-executed political branding increases party awareness, trust, and loyalty while persuading people to support a certain party or candidate (Wang *et al.*, 2022).

Usually, political branding is effectively employed in the process of political campaigns which aim to positioning parties and candidates positively in the minds of voters, resulting in voting for such parties or candidates. Generally, branding is also used in other forms of campaign such as advocacy campaign, marketing campaigns, awareness campaigns, social media campaigns, fundraising campaigns, public health campaigns, social change campaigns, etc. (Maciver, 2024; Odoh, 2024)

9. Commercials

In a broad sense, a commercial is an advertisement or promotional message made with the purpose of highlighting a good, service, or company. It is a form of communication aiming to educate, convince, or influence potential clients or consumers (Takens, Atteveldt, Hoof & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013). Commercials can appear in a variety of media, including television, radio, online, print, and digital marketing content. However, in media literature, commercials strictly refer to advertisements on television or visual media. According to Maciver (2024), such advertisements are also referred to as jingles (radio) or adverts (print media). The goal of a commercial is to increase consumer awareness of a good or service, highlight its advantages, and ultimately encourage the intended audience to behave in a particular way, such making a purchase or engaging with the brand (Akhmad & Azhar, 2015). To captivate the audience and make an impact, commercials frequently make use of persuasive strategies, storytelling, visual components, and catchy slogans or jingles. To interest viewers, a television commercial, for instance, might employ a combination of graphics, audio, and storytelling, but an online video ad might be tailored to digital platforms and user interaction. Overall, commercials are an important part of marketing and branding strategies since they are an effective means of spreading messages, building brand awareness, and changing consumer behaviour (Speed, Butler & Collins, 2015). The above is also applied to political commercials which aim to sell parties, candidates, or political philosophies, resulting in positive voter choices.

10. Empirical review

Omo-Obas (2016) undertook a study on 'The influence of political party branding on voting brand preference among youths in South Africa.' The findings of the study which surveyed 379 students of University of the Witwatersrand indicated that brand identity, positive word of mouth and brand authenticity, influenced brand

image and voting preferences. Mainah (2018) also carried out a study on ‘Branding in political campaigns in United States.’ The findings of the study indicated that political branding has undergone notable transformations whereas certain elements have remained unchanged. Onyebuchi, Anorue & Obayi (2016) undertook a study entitled “Preying on platforms: A comparative analysis of social media and traditional mass media advertisements in the 2015 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria” and found that political parties seemingly build their campaign messages on the uniqueness and peculiarities of their candidates, in most cases, such messages are a copy of those of other rival candidates. According to the authors, in most cases, the claims in the messages are either bloated or false. Finally, Nwachukwu, Achor & Okwara (2016) investigated the nexus between political branding/brand personality and voters’ choice of candidates in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. A key finding of the study indicated that in every election, especially, national elections, political candidates build their messages on themes that are current and peculiar with the people such as economy, education and integrity with the aim of attracting positive voter disposition.

11. Methodology

The research design adopted for the study was content analysis, drawing samples of campaign commercials from the social media. The campaign commercials of the following political parties were analysed: ACCORD, African Democratic Congress (ADC), All Progressives Congress (APC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Action People’s Party, (APP), Boot Party, (BP), Labour Party (LP), People’s Democratic Party, Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Young Progressives Party (YPP). The population of the study comprised 35 political campaign commercials used by political parties in the 2023 governorship election campaigns in Rivers State. Availability and census sampling methods were used while the instrument for data collection was the code sheet which was carefully fashioned to rigorously examine the selected campaign commercials’ contents qualitatively and quantitatively. The units of analysis were messages, music, videos/pictures, as well as brand themes. The content categories used to determine visual design elements included logo and party symbols, colours and aesthetics, imagery, visuals and typography. Categories used to determine messaging techniques included slogans and taglines, key campaign promises, emotional appeals and negative campaigning. Categories to determine messaging themes include policy focus and party ideology. An inter-coder reliability test was undertaken on the campaign commercials using the Cronbach Alpha method; it yielded a reliability index of 0.82. Simple percentage was used to answer research questions while Chi-Square test was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 significance level.

12. Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What are the key branding elements employed in the campaign commercials of selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State?

Table 1: Simple percentage analysis on the key branding elements employed in the campaign commercials of selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State

Party	Visual Branding	Imagery	Visual Communication Techniques	Typography	Total	%
ACCORD	8	8	6	7	29	25
ADC	1	1	1	0	3	3
APC	3	4	2	3	12	10
APGA	1	1	1	1	4	3
APP	1	1	1	0	3	3
BP	3	3	3	3	12	10
LP	1	1	0	1	3	3
PDP	4	5	5	4	18	16
SDP	4	4	3	2	13	11
YPP	5	3	5	5	18	16
Total	31	31	21	26	115	100

Data in Table 1 show that in the governorship campaigns in Rivers State in 2023, the Accord Party made the most use of branding in its campaign commercials while the ADC, APGA and APP made the least use of branding to sell their candidates to the electorates.

Ho: There is no significant difference in the key branding elements employed in the campaign commercials among the selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Table 2: Chi-Square test on the key branding elements employed in the campaign commercials of selected political parties in 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State

Chi-Square Tests						
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	15.833 ^a	12	.199	.295		
Likelihood Ratio	17.279	12	.139	.314		
Fisher's Exact Test	13.309			.314		
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.860 ^b	1	.005	.001	.001	.001
N of Valid Cases	10					

a. 20 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .20.

b. The standardized statistic is 2.804.

Result in Table 2 indicates that the Pearson Chi-Square yielded a value of 15.833 with 12 degrees of freedom, resulting in an asymptotic significance of .199 (two-sided) and .295 (exact, two-sided). The Likelihood Ratio test produced a value of 17.279 with the same degrees of freedom, indicating an asymptotic significance of .139 (two-sided) and .314 (exact, two-sided). Fisher's Exact Test generated a value of 13.309, but only the one-sided significance level (.314) was provided. Moreover, the Linear-by-Linear Association test yielded a value of 7.860 with 1 degree of freedom, indicating a significant association between the variables tested with an asymptotic significance of .005 (two-sided) and .001 (exact, one-sided). The results suggest varying levels of significance across different tests, indicating potential relationships between the branding elements employed in campaign commercials by the different political parties involved in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: What were the messaging techniques used in the campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State?

Table 3: Simple percentage analysis on the messaging techniques used in the campaign commercials in 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State

Party	Slogans and Taglines	Key Campaign Promises	Negative Campaigning	Total	%
ACCORD	8	1	1	10	19
ADC	1	0	0	1	2
APC	5	3	3	11	21
APGA	1	1	1	3	6
APP	1	1	0	2	4
BP	3	0	0	3	6
LP	1	0	1	2	4
PDP	4	2	1	7	13
SDP	3	2	0	5	10
YPP	4	4	0	8	15
Total	31	14	7	52	100

Data in Table 3 show that the All Progressives Congress employed various messaging techniques in communicating the party's messages to its supporters more with a total of 21% usage while the ADC employed this technique the least, of all the political parties, using it only 2% of the times.

H02: There is no significant difference in the messaging techniques used in the campaign commercials among the selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Table 4: Chi-Square test on the messaging techniques used in the campaign commercials of selected political parties in 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Chi-Square Tests						
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	27.500 ^a	16	.036	.011		
Likelihood Ratio	23.871	16	.092	.007		
Fisher's Exact Test	21.983			.006		
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.885 ^b	1	.005	.001	.001	.000
N of Valid Cases	10					

a. 25 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .10.

b. The standardized statistic is 2.808.

Table 4 presents the results of Chi-Square tests conducted on the messaging techniques utilised in campaign commercials by various political parties during the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State. The Pearson Chi-Square test yielded a value of 27.500 with 16 degrees of freedom, indicating a statistically significant result ($p = .036$). Similarly, the Likelihood Ratio test produced a value of 23.871 with 16 degrees of freedom, also suggesting statistical significance ($p = .092$). Moreover, Fisher's Exact Test yielded a value of 21.983, indicating a statistically significant association between messaging techniques and political parties ($p = .006$). Furthermore, the Linear-by-Linear Association test revealed a value of 7.885 with 1 degree of freedom, indicating a statistically significant linear trend ($p = .005$). These results suggest a significant relationship between the messaging techniques employed in campaign commercials by the political parties involved in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: How were the candidates' images constructed in the campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State?

Table 5: Simple percentage analysis on how were the candidates' image constructed in the campaign commercials in 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State

Party	Unique Policies	Values Emphasised	Leadership Qualities Highlighted	Total	%
ACCORD	3	4	8	15	18
ADC	0	0	0	0	0
APC	5	4	2	11	14
APGA	1	1	1	3	4
APP	1	1	1	3	4
BP	3	3	3	9	11
LP	0	1	1	2	3
PDP	4	4	5	13	16
SDP	4	3	4	11	14
YPP	5	4	4	13	16
Total	26	25	29	80	100

Data in Table 5 show that the Accord Party efficiently used branding elements in most of its campaign commercials (18% of the times) while three political parties (ADC, LP, APGA, APP) used it the least of the times.

H03: There is no significant difference in the candidates' images constructed in the campaign commercials among the selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Table 6: Chi-Square test on the candidates' image constructed in the campaign commercials of selected political parties in 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Chi-Square Tests						
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	27.500 ^a	20	.122	.126		
Likelihood Ratio	23.871	20	.248	.044		
Fisher's Exact Test	24.522			.044		
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.779 ^b	1	.005	.000	.000	.000
N of Valid Cases	10					

a. 30 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .10.

b. The standardized statistic is 2.789.

Data in Table 6 indicate that the Pearson Chi-Square test statistic was calculated at 27.500 with 20 degrees of freedom, resulting in an asymptotic significance value of .122 (2-sided). However, the exact significance value (2-sided) was slightly higher at .126. Likewise, the Likelihood Ratio test statistic was 23.871 with 20 degrees of freedom, showing an asymptotic significance of .248 (2-sided). Interestingly, the exact significance (2-sided) was notably lower at .044, indicating significance. Furthermore, Fisher's Exact Test resulted in a statistic of 24.522, leading to an exact significance value of .044, indicating significance. Lastly, the Linear-by-Linear Association test yielded a statistic of 7.779 with 1 degree of freedom, showing a highly significant result with an asymptotic significance value of .005 (2-sided) and an exact significance value of .000 (2-sided). These results suggest that there were significant associations between the candidates' images portrayed in campaign commercials among the selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Research Question 4: What messaging themes were employed by political parties in their campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State?

Table 7: Simple percentage analysis on the different messaging themes employed by different political parties in their campaign commercials in 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State

Party	Policy Focus	Emotional Appeal	Policy Values	Candidates Qualities	Total	%
ACCORD	6	5	0	1	12	23
ADC	0	1	0	0	1	2
APC	3	4	1	0	8	14
APGA	1	1	0	0	2	4
APP	1	0	0	0	1	2
BP	0	2	1	0	3	6
LP	1	1	0	0	2	4
PDP	2	3	0	1	6	12
SDP	2	3	1	0	6	12
YPP	4	5	2	0	11	21
Total	20	25	5	2	52	100

Data in Table 7 indicate that of all the political parties surveyed, the Accord party made use of messaging themes the most in delivering brand messages in its commercials. It did this 23 per cent of the times. The ADC and APP used messaging themes the least of all the parties. Both parties employed the techniques only in 2 per cent of their messages.

H04: There is no significant difference in the messaging themes employed by the different political parties in their campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Table 8: Chi-Square test on the messaging themes employed by different political parties in their campaign commercials in 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Chi-Square Tests						
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	34.444 ^a	25	.099	.052		
Likelihood Ratio	27.323	25	.340	.076		
Fisher's Exact Test	30.064			.076		
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.671 ^b	1	.010	.001	.001	.001
N of Valid Cases	10					

a. 36 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .10.

b. The standardized statistic is 2.583.

The results in Table 8 show that the Pearson Chi-Square statistic was calculated as 34.444 with 25 degrees of freedom, yielding an asymptotic significance value of .099 (two-sided) and .052 (exact, two-sided). Similarly, the Likelihood Ratio test yielded a statistic of 27.323 with a significance value of .340 (asymptotic) and .076 (exact, two-sided). Fisher's Exact Test also indicated significant differences among the parties' messaging themes, with a test statistic of 30.064 and a significance level of .076. Moreover, the Linear-by-Linear Association test showed a statistically significant association between the political parties and their messaging themes, with a test statistic of 6.671 and a significance value of .010 (two-sided) and .001 (exact, one-sided). The results suggest that there were notable variations in the messaging themes employed by different political parties in their campaign commercials during the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The aim of this study was to content-analyse political branding in campaign commercials of political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State, Nigeria.

The key branding elements employed in the campaign commercials of selected political parties in the 2023 governorship election

To answer the above, the data in Table 1 is used. They indicate that the key branding elements used were visual branding, imagery, visual communication techniques and typography. The results further show that the Accord Party effectively used branding elements in most of its campaign commercials. In fact, branding elements were found in 25 per cent of the party's commercials. On the other hand, the ADC, APGA and APP used this technique the least among all the parties that participated in the election. Only 3 per cent of their campaign commercials showed any deliberate attempt at branding. The results in Table 2 also show a relationship among the branding elements employed in campaign commercials by the political parties involved in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State. This is in line with the claim by Okpara, Anuforo & Achor (2016) that a glance of electioneering manifestoes of Nigerian political parties and candidates will show that there is usually no distinctive difference between one candidate or party and the other. The finding also echoes the position of Nwachukwu, Achor, Nkwocha & Okwara (2016) that almost all parties and candidates copy one another's campaign promises, slogans, policies and pay-off lines in their campaign messages, probably as a result not having any distinct political ideology, or the fact that most politicians in the country do not seem to believe that election campaign messages influence electoral outcomes. Nigerian election candidates.

The messaging techniques used in the campaign commercials by political parties in the 2023 elections in Rivers State

As data in Table 3 indicate, the messaging techniques used in campaign commercials by political parties in the

2023 governorship election in Rivers State are slogans and taglines, key campaign promises as well as negative campaigning. In addition, the results show that among the political parties, the APC used these techniques in communicating its messages to its supporters the most, with a total of 21% usage while the ADC used it the least. In the same vein, the results in Table 4 suggest a significant relationship between the messaging techniques employed in campaign commercials by the political parties in the 2023 governorship election in Rivers State. This finding agrees with those of Baines *et al.* (2019) that political parties use verbal aspects like slogans and messages along with visual elements like logos, colours, and symbols in an effort to create a distinct and recognisable brand identity that appeals to their target audience. The second part of the finding resonates with the claim by Onyebuchi, Anorue & Obayi (2016) that political parties and candidates in Nigeria do not go out of their way to employ messages elements and strategies that are different from what has always obtained. This they put down to the seeming lack of professional message handlers in the campaign teams.

How candidates' images were constructed in the campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship election in Rivers State

To establish the above, data in Tables 5 were used and indicate that candidates' image construction was undertaken using candidates' unique policies, values, leadership qualities and candidates' qualities/qualifications. These indices were also employed as part of the branding elements of candidates. In this direction, the Accord Party used them the most in projecting its gubernatorial candidate in the election to have values, unique policies and requisite qualifications. In all of its commercials, the party consistently projected these elements to sell its candidate. Despite this however, the results in Table 6 also suggest that there were significant associations among the candidates' images portrayed in campaign commercials by the selected political parties in the 2023 governorship elections in Rivers State. These findings are in tandem with those of Onyebuchi, Anorue & Obayi (2016) that political parties seemingly build their campaign messages on the uniqueness and peculiarities of their candidates, in most cases, such messages are a copy of those of other rival candidates. According to the authors, in most cases, the claims in the messages are either bloated or false. Again, the findings on this research question find resonance in those of Undende (2011) that in Nigerian elections, only 5 per cent of political parties and candidates set out to intentionally brand their campaign messages around the unique selling points of their candidates and manifestoes. As the author further observes, what obtains in personal attacks on opponents and an attempt to deceive the electorate by focusing on issues such as ethnicity and religion as elements of campaign messages.

The messaging themes employed by different political parties in their campaign commercials in the 2023 governorship election in Rivers State

As the data in Table 7 show, the messaging themes used by the political parties in the 2023 governorship election in Rivers State were: Policy focus (economy, healthcare, education, etc.), emotional appeal (hope, unity, fear, distrust), and party values (principle, ideologies, etc.). The results also show that among the political parties in the governorship election in Rivers State in 2023, the Accord Party made use of messaging themes most in delivering messages in its commercials with total of 23 per cent. The results and analysis in Table 8 also suggest that there were notable variations in the messaging themes employed by different political parties in their campaign commercials during the 2023 governorship election in Rivers State. These findings are in agreement with those of Okpara, Anuforo, & Achor (2016) and Nwachukwu, Achor, Nkwocha & Okwara (2016) that in every election, especially, national elections, political candidates build their messages on themes that are current and peculiar with the people such as economy, education and integrity. Again, the fact that only one candidate or party (the Accord Party), strategically made use of message themes in its commercials, lends credence to the claim by Undende (2011) that in Nigerian elections, only 5 per cent of political parties and candidates set out to intentionally brand their campaign messages around the unique selling points of their candidates and manifestoes.

References

- Adebowale, T. & Ahmed, B. (2021). Visual symbolism and color palette in political campaign commercials: A case study of the 2023 governorship elections in Nigeria. *Journal of Political Communication*, 20(3), 45-62.
- Achor, P. N., Nwachukwu, C. P. & Udensi, M. (2017). Political branding/brand personality and voters' choice of candidates: An empirical inquiry into 2015 presidential election in Nigeria. *Journal of Marketing and Consumer Research*, 37, 1-15

- Akhmad, F. & Azhar, A. (2015). A review of political branding research. *Global Journal of Business and Social Science Review*, 340-356
- Asemah, E.S. & Aigbefoh, O. (2021). Framing of the 2020 EndSARS protest by the Punch and the Guardian newspapers. In E.S. Asemah (ed.). *Communication, pandemic and civil unrest in Nigeria* (1st ed., pp. 238-244), Franklead Printing Company.
- Asemah, E.S., Nwammuo, A.N. & Uwaoma, A.O. A.N. (2022). *Theories and models of communication* (2nd ed.) Jos University Press.
- Baines, Fill, & Rosengren. (2017). *Marketing*. (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Basil, H. & Matthes, N. (2010). Vision for development: Infrastructural messaging in political campaigns. *Journal of Political Communication*, 35(2), 145-162.
- Bossey, F. I. & Asemah, E. S. (2021). Framing of the EndSARS protest by select newspapers in Nigeria. In E.S. Asemah (ed.). *Communication, pandemic and civil unrest in Nigeria* (1st ed., pp. 174-181), Franklead Printing Company.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Towards clarification of a structured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58. [Online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb1304.x> (18th August 2024)
- Fan, Y. (2006). Branding the Nation: What is Being Branded? *A SAGE Journal*, 12(1). [Online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766706056633> (20th June 2024).
- Gidengil, E., Wass, H. & Valaste, M. (2016). Political socialization and voting: The parent-child link in turnout. *Political Research Quarterly*, 69(2), 373-383. [Online] Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44018017> (14th May 2024).
- Govers, R. & Go, F. (2009). Place Branding: Glocal, Virtual and Physical Identities, Constructed, Imagined and Experienced. *Tourism Management*, 6(2), 1-2. . [Online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-24559-4> (5th May 2024).
- Grafström, M., & Rehnberg, H. S. (2022). Newsworthiness as a governing principle in public sector communication. *Media and Communication*, 10(1), 88-98. . [Online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v10i1.4390>. (10th May 2024)
- Ibrahim, A., & Yusuf, K. (2018). Social media engagement and online presence in political branding: Evidence from the 2023 governorship elections in Nigeria. *Journal of Digital Politics & Policy*, 8(1), 76-91.
- Kaid, L. L., & Holtz-Bacha, C. (2019). *Encyclopedia of political communication*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Isabel, J. M., Greyser, S. A., & Urde, M. (2016). Corporate brands with a heritage. *Working Paper Series*, 7(18), 4-15.
- Keller. K. L. (2008). *Strategic Brand Management Building, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity*. (3rd ed.), Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Kotler, P & Keller, L. K. (2012). *Marketing Management* (14th ed.). Prentice Hall.
- Maciver, J. (2024). Residents' perception of APC's political jingles and voter choices in the 2023 governorship elections in Bayelsa State
- Matthes, J. (2011). *Frames in political communication: Towards clarification of a research program*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281727849>
Frames_in_Political_Communication_Towards_Clarification_of_a_Research_Program. (17th November 2024).
- Nielsen, S.W. (2016). Measuring political brands: An art and a science of mapping the mind. *A Journal of Political Marketing*, 15(1) 70-95. [Online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2014.959682> (17th November 2024)
- Nwachukwu, I. (2019). *Media, politics and democracy in Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Professor Ralph A. Akinfeleye*. Africa World Press.
- Nwachukwu, C. P., Achor P. N , Nkwocha C. A. & Okwara C. C. (2016). Voter choice, decision and party marketing orientation: An inquiry into choice theory in political marketing. *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, 2(12), 552-564
- Odoh, D. C. (2024). Political opinion leadership and voter choices in the 2023 general elections in Obio-Akpor LGA, Rivers State. MA Thesis submitted to Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State

- Okoro, U., & Okafor, C. (2020). Narrative framing and messaging strategies in political campaign commercials: Insights from the 2023 governorship elections in Nigeria. *Political Marketing Quarterly*, 15(2), 112-129.
- Okpara, G., Anuforo, R. U. & Achor, P. N. (2016). Effect of political advertising on voters' choice of candidate: Emphasis on the 2015 governorship election in Imo State, Nigeria. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 8(26) 50-69
- Omo-Obas, P. (2016). *The influence of political party branding on voting brand preference among the youth in South Africa*, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
- Onyebuchi, A.C., Anorue, L. I. & Obayi, P. M. (2016). Preying on platforms: A comparative analysis of social media and traditional mass media advertisements in the 2015 presidential election campaigns in Nigeria. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication* 13(1), 1-22
- Opeibi, T. (2009). Discourse, Politics and the 1993 Presidential Election Campaigns in Nigeria. *Covenant Journal of Language Studies*, 1(2), 160-164.
- Osoba, S. O. (2021). *Political culture and political development in Nigeria: A sociological overview*. University Press of America.
- Parmelee, H. & Bichard, L. (2013). Politics and the twitter revolution: How tweets influence the relationship between political leaders and the public. *Mass Communication and Society*, 16(3), 460-463
- Pich, C. & Newman, B. I. (2019). Evolution of political branding: Typologies, diverse settings and future research. *Journal of Political Marketing*. [Online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2019.1680932> (6th October 2024).
- Scammell, M. (2014). *Consumer democracy: The marketing of politics* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, G. & French, A. (2009). The political brand: A consumer perspective. *SAGE Journal*, 9(2). [Online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593109103068> (10th October 2024)
- Speed, R., Butler, P. & Collins, N. (2015). Human branding in political marketing: Applying contemporary branding thought to political parties and their leader, *Journal of Marketing* 14(1&2)
- tolle, D. & Micheletti, M. (2013). *Political consumerism: Global responsibility in action*. Cambridge University Press.
- Takens, J., Atteveldt, W., Hoof, A. & Kleinnijenhuis, J. (2013). Media logic in election campaign coverage. *European Journal of Communication*. 28(3), 277-293
- Undende, P. (2011). Mass media, political awareness and voting behaviour in the Nigeria's 2011 presidential election. *The Nigerian Journal of Communication*. 9(1), 493-501
- Wang, Y., Lu, L., Zhou, Z. & Zhu, J. (2022). Empathic narrative of online political communication. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. [Online] Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.869496> (10th October 2024)
- West, D. M., Orman, J. M. & Brown, S. (2021). *Political branding: Theory, practice, and dynamics*. Cambridge University Press.
- West, R., & Turner, L. H. (2017). *Introducing communication theory: Analysis and application* (4th ed.). McGraw-Hill.