ABSTRACT

In this chapter the aim is to analyze multimodal realisation of contemporary Nigerian politics from a critical view point by considering political party images which are constructed and exploited in Nigerian politics to guarantee sustenance of interests by party stalwarts’ patronage and consequently, electoral victory. The methodology consists of, first, outlining the political images and slogans; then socio-culturally and linguistically interpreting the symbols, and finally drawing effects of imaging on the ‘ideology’ and affiliation of political parties in Nigeria. The 1607 page September 2011 Source Book on Political Parties’ Manifestoes and Constitutions is the data source. Significant is that not more than 7 parties of about 69 parties profiled in the Source book, as at end of 2011 elections, interprets for the followers its symbols; thus not only leaving to guesses what the symbols either meant or are intended to convey but also significant is that what the symbols communicate ideologically are often not obvious neither to the casual to the casual reader nor even to the political elites behind the parties.

INTRODUCTION

Visual communication permeates the domain of politics. To construct meaning and appropriately convey nuances of meanings in political discourse, there is often the subtle need to pair verbal and non-verbal/visual components. In politics, party symbols and slogans often appear as defining political preferences of individuals, affiliations, etc. However, rarely do Nigerian political parties’ manifestoes differ one from another. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) advocates reading a single image in multiple ways and their
work establishes how that images should be analysed on the basis of sound semiotic principles which involves describing the image meanings as either representational, interactive and/or compositional.

In political communication as in all communication, the audience is the most critical element preceded, of course, by the message; it must be clearly identified and uniquely treated, for instance, each political party subscriber/stalwart cherishes his/her own uniqueness and identifies only with the political communicator who so treats it.

The political party, as the political aspirant, is a communicator of ideas. Using political images and slogans as branding tools both the political party and their candidates—whether having secured their party’s nomination or even while aspiring for the party ticket—always attempt to provoke certain reactions from the political audience or party subscriber/stalwart in order to bring about a greater patronage of both their party and campaigns and to mobilise political supporters. The aim is specifically to secure electoral victory. This ‘reaction’ is evidently evoked by words and ideas—slogans— as well as by the party emblem and can be regarded as ‘propaganda’. But what is propaganda and the dimensions of propaganda in political discourse? How do party emblems and slogans serve as branding tools in political communication?

Propaganda is many things to different people. Doob (1966) and Merton (1957) are appropriately close to our needs in this study. Doob (1966:240) defines Propaganda as:

(The) attempt to affect the personalities and to control the behaviour of individuals towards ends considered unscientific or of doubtful value in a society at a particular time.

Doob further telescoped this thesis by refining ‘propaganda’ as: “an influence exerted by either an individual or group upon another person or group” ibid. It is this ‘influence’ that Merton (1957:58) believes constitute ‘any and (or) all sets of symbols which influence(s) opinion, belief or action.’ For Hollander (1961, 265-271) propaganda is ‘(the) presentation of selected information to influence others for the direct benefit of the propagandist or a cause which he serves.’ Although the focus of Brown (1967:22-28) was on advertising, his definition of advertising as: ‘(a) competition to persuade us (consumers) to move in various directions one of which we are bound to take’ fits and alludes so aptly to politics and political communication particularly using multimodal tools.

Although there appears to be a distinction between politics and propaganda, while some believe propaganda is inevitable in politics, to others not all politics is propaganda; however, we believe, for our purpose, that since their methods and goals overlaps or ‘neutralise’ each other, and since they subsume each other and are rarely differentiated, we should perhaps apprehend these as the same concept. The justification for this comes from Brown (1967:22-28) who isolates eight techniques of propaganda (or politics) which he itemized as follows: use of stereotypes, substitution of names, selection, downright lying, repetition, assertion, pinpointing the enemy, and appeals. Earlier, Roger Brown’s (1958:300) investigation on ‘propaganda’ has led him to conclude that there are only seven methods of irrational persuasion through which every propaganda effort succeeds or fails. These he listed as: (a) name calling (b.) glittering generalization (c.) transfer (d.) testimonials (e.) plain-folks (f.) card stacking, and lastly, (g.) bandwagon. All these features characterise politics and constitutes features of political communication.

Slogans or catchphrases are simplified linguistic constructions deliberately designed and used to facilitate memorability. Sloganeering is a conscious attempt in used in political communication to confer a certain ‘uniqueness’ to the message as well as the political party. In terms of their overall structure, generally, slogans are very brief; almost banal; simple, and are often semantically dense. This is necessarily so because political parties and politicians, particularly at campaigns, each constrained by time