

VISUAL COMMUNICATION, PROPAGANDA AND NIGERIAN POLITICAL ADVERTS

Kofoworola, Wale Ridwan

Department of Creative Arts Education
Federal College of Education Technical Akoka
derealconcepts@gmail.com

Abstract

The growing reliance on visual communication in Nigerian political advertising has transformed electoral campaigns into powerful spots of persuasion and ideological propagation. However, scholarly discourse has largely emphasized campaign rhetoric, with narrow attention given to the visual strategies through which persuasion and propaganda are fashioned and disseminated. This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between visual communication, propaganda, and Nigerian political adverts, with particular emphasis on how visual elements shape political perception and their implied interpretation. The paper is anchored in Erwin Panofsky's Iconological Theory, which provides a framework for interpreting the symbolic, cultural, and ideological meanings entrenched in political advertisements. A qualitative research approach was adopted, employing purposive sampling of selected political adverts in Nigeria's contemporary democratic elections. Data were analyzed using iconographic and interpretive visual analysis to examine recurring tropes, colour symbolism, imagery, typography, and compositional techniques. Findings reveal that Nigerian political adverts strategically deploy culturally familiar symbols, national colours, iconic imagery, and emotional visual narratives as persuasive tools, and perhaps employing propaganda devices that construct political identities and reinforce ideological messages that may shape public opinion. The study further demonstrates that visual components frequently exert greater persuasive influence than textual content, making them central to contemporary political communication. It concludes that a critical understanding of visual tropes in advertising is essential for strengthening media literacy, promoting informed electoral participation, and advancing scholarship on political visual culture in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Visual Communication, Political Propaganda, Advertising, Political Adverts, Iconography.*

Introduction

Visual art is a creative field that has a strong bond with other disciplines, such as advertising, mass communication, politics, education, architecture, medicine, technology, among others. Events and times has brought great dynamism into art practice; visual art has gone beyond the art of painting on board, clay modeling, and graphical illustration on paper alone to a more sophisticated multimedia practice, embodying new media and expression. The key focus of this paper is the cultural references and power dynamics embedded in political advertising. Some of the main roles of

visual arts are to pass specific information to a targeted audience or society, and also the visual aesthetics, where artists creatively express themselves with different media to evoke emotional responses and please the eyes.

Thus, every visual artist has a specific style and method of expression. Also, graphics, which is a major component of visual art, has witnessed a great revolution over the years; visual communication designers are now exposed to multifaceted technological expressions. This has led to various innovations and creative exploration. Graphic art is a strong

communication device that combines visual elements such as colour, typography, imagery, lines, and shapes with the application of the principles of design to express complex ideas efficiently. Graphic design maintains a profound synergy with marketing, packaging, and advertising.

Advertising is needed to communicate, promote, and propagate products, services, or ideas to the public; to do so, the idea or product has to be well packaged to make it marketable. In political advertising, designers package the adverts not only to be visually appealing, but to express political interests and dogma visually. These visual devices are used to galvanize support for the political party or candidates; the adverts are conceptualized to imbibe one or more devices of propaganda to be able to make the message hit the target.

Politics is an integral aspect of society, irrespective of the mode in which it is practiced; politics has subsisted for centuries in every community. Political proliferation in Nigeria, especially, has today witnessed a great revolution in which visual advertising has been a key player. Olujide, Adeyemi and Gbadeyan (2010) described political advertising as 'the use of media by political candidates to increase their exposure to the public. Nigerian visual advertising often blends information, entertainment, and politics, using colloquial language and popular culture to engage observers.' Through political campaigns and awareness creation, Nigerian politicians have exploited such visual motifs, icons, and slogans as party logos, flags, and colours to galvanize support for their political ambitions. It is therefore imperative to explore the prevalence of such advertisements to understand what the icons/symbols convey and the reasons why they are used. Nigerian advertisements over the years has employed several campaign and advertising devices; these appeared in both the traditional advertising system and the contemporary media, including print, indoor and outdoor, digital, television, branded items, and social media. The visual codes employed in every advert convey a political message in political advertising. This study examines how imagery and concepts function as part of the overt propaganda in the

Nigerian space, using theories of iconography. The development of advertising in Nigeria, according to Bel-Molokwu (2000, p. 9), is as old as man. The word "advertising" comes from the Latin "advertere," meaning to draw attention. In amplifying the history of advertising in Nigeria, Ogbodoh (1990) also states:

"Advertising in Nigeria is said to have begun naturally with one of the earliest forms of mass communication town crying. This traditional African medium performed the universal communication function of disseminating information about available goods, services, and ideas to the people" (pp. 10-11).

Advertising has always been known for its use of visual signs, employing words, "typography" and pictures (Angelique van Niekerk, 2018, p. 110). Advertising in Nigeria has spread across various areas of endeavour, which is also intertwined with the political landscape. Historical accounts note that, even after independence, political campaigns in Nigeria still used various visual media ranging from television commercials, newspapers, magazines, posters, flyers, banners, stage branding, stickers, vehicle branding, billboards, branded gazebos, online /social media ads, and even ephemeral methods (body painting, skywriting, and performance) to shape public opinion. Advertising and propaganda have been an integral part of the electioneering system in Nigeria, which still has a strong voice in the contemporary political landscape. Political advertisers make use of performance and ephemeral methods of advertising together with the prevalent advertising system. The performance aspect of advertising has been part of the traditional African political system for ages, which also has a strong relationship with visual arts.

The election process and the emergence of political candidate(s) often have vital effects on the economy and future of the country. For example, graphic artists, printers, painters, publishers, art writers, photographers, sign

writers, and other creative artists, both academic and street artists, are engaged in the advertising ideation; they also actively contribute concepts used in the advertisement, especially visuals, which are used to propagate political ideas and intentions. This explains the fact that, apart from conceptualizing aesthetic works, creative artists also add value to the political topography of Nigeria. Artists are those who use their artistic prowess to bring visual adverts alive. “effect visuals contribute to an advertisement's success include capturing the reader's attention, arousing the reader's interest in the headline, creating a favourable impression of the product or advertiser, and providing continuity for the campaign by using a unified visual technique” (Arens et al, 2013, p. 346).

Interestingly, as technology advances, so also the modes of advertising in Nigeria. The proliferation of digital technologies has significantly transformed the production, distribution, and reception of political advertisements, making digital platforms an indispensable medium for political communication. In Nigeria's advertising landscape, one of the major beneficiaries of this development is the political class. Political actors increasingly employ sophisticated visual strategies across print, broadcast, outdoor, and digital media during election campaigns to persuade voters, construct political identities, and promote ideological positions. Beyond improved accessibility and visibility, digital media have expanded the aesthetic possibilities of political advertising, allowing for richer visual compositions, rapid dissemination, and greater audience engagement. Nevertheless, the persuasive power of political advertising lies primarily in its visual and semiotic construction. As Van Enschoet et al. (2008) observe, advertisers often adopt an aesthetic rather than literal approach, relying heavily on visual communication to communicate complex ideas and influence audiences (p. 35). Political advertisements therefore combine typography, colour, symbols, imagery, slogans, and cultural references to produce persuasive meanings that extend beyond their immediate visual appearance.

Within this context, rhetoric remains a fundamental component of political communication. The visual artist or creative designer does not merely produce aesthetically pleasing images but consciously constructs persuasive visual narratives that align with specific political ideologies and campaign objectives. Aristotle's rhetorical appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos provide useful insight into how political advertisements function. Ethos establishes credibility and trustworthiness; pathos appeals to collective emotions by drawing attention to issues such as insecurity, unemployment, poverty, education, and economic hardship; while logos relies on factual claims, policy promises, and logical arguments to persuade the electorate (Saucedo, 2016). These rhetorical strategies are frequently embedded within visual compositions through colour schemes, typography, symbolic objects, and culturally recognizable motifs. Ademilokun (2019) emphasizes that Nigerian political discourse operates at multiple levels—linguistic, sociological, psychological, and cultural, demonstrating how power is embedded in political language.

Similarly, Nigerian political advertisements consistently employ national and party-related symbols, including the national flag, coat of arms, party logos, umbrellas, brooms, keys, books, pens, cockerels, horses, birds, handshakes, and family imagery. These visual elements function not merely as decorative devices but as iconological signs that communicate cultural memory, political ideology, collective identity, and historical consciousness. Although previous studies on Nigerian political advertising have extensively examined political advertising, campaign communication, political rhetoric, voter behaviour, discourse analysis, framing, and persuasive language, considerably less scholarly attention has been devoted to the **iconological interpretation of visual elements** embedded within political advertisements. Existing literature has largely emphasized verbal rhetoric, linguistic strategies, media effects, and campaign communication, while the deeper symbolic meanings conveyed through visual forms, artistic composition, cultural symbolism,

and historical references remain comparatively underexplored. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding how visual tropes operate as instruments of political persuasion and propaganda within Nigeria's democratic landscape.

The study addresses this gap by adopting Erwin Panofsky's **Theory of Iconology** as its analytical framework to examine the artistic, symbolic, cultural, and ideological meanings embedded in the selected Nigerian political advertisements. Specifically, the study investigates political advertisements used in Nigeria's contemporary Nigeria's political landscape across selected channels such as print, outdoor, and digital campaign materials. Through iconological interpretation, the study demonstrates how visual arts contribute to the construction of political identity, ideological persuasion, propaganda, and cultural representation in Nigeria's evolving democratic landscape. By foregrounding visual symbolism rather than solely verbal discourse, the study contributes a fresh perspective to scholarship on political advertising, visual communication, political persuasion, and propaganda studies.

Research Questions

- What recurring visual elements appear in the selected Nigerian political advertisements?
- What cultural and ideological meanings do these elements communicate?
- Which propaganda strategies are constructed through dress, colour, typography, slogans and political symbols?
- How do these strategies vary across candidates, parties, elections and intended audiences?

Visual Iconology in Nigerian Political Advertising

Political advertising in Nigeria employs creative and strategic use of visual tropes, icons, symbols, cultural emblems, and historical imagery to communicate political messages, construct identity, and possibly influence voter decisions. In Nigerian political advertising,

visual icons and symbols carry immense strategic weight. In a nation of over 250 ethnic groups and varying religious beliefs, symbols serve as instant visual signatures for party identity, core values, and political visual. Political parties and actors rely greatly on these visual imageries to bypass rhetorical expression and tap into deep-seated ethno-religious and cultural opinions. These icons are deeply rooted in cultural, philosophical, historical, religious, and political intonations; as everyone is delighted to be associated with his or her culture, political actors often capitalize on society's admiration towards the culture and other societal affiliations. This is by stamping the cultural object of the society in the advert; during the political (physical) campaign, the political actors ensure that they are fully dressed in the indigenous attire of the people whom they are canvassing (Plate 1 & 2). Cultural appeal is deployed at this point; even if the candidate does not believe in the culture of the society, the political actors usually apply a propagandist device by associating with the people in traditional attire, even if it will have to be removed immediately after the campaign.

Politics is an integral aspect of society, irrespective of the mode in which it is practiced; politics has subsisted for centuries in every community. Political proliferation in Nigeria, especially, has today witnessed a great revolution in which visual advertising has been a key player. Olujide, Adeyemi and Gbadeyan (2010) described political advertising as 'the use of media by political candidates to increase their exposure to the public. Nigerian visual advertising often blends information, entertainment, and politics, using colloquial language and popular culture to engage observers.' Through political campaigns and awareness creation, Nigerian politicians have exploited such visual motifs, icons, and slogans as party logos, flags, and colours to galvanize support for their political ambitions. It is therefore imperative to explore the prevalence of such advertisements to understand what the icons/symbols convey and the reasons why they are used. Nigerian advertisements over the years has employed several campaign and advertising devices; these appeared in both the traditional advertising system and the contemporary media,

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In visual communication and political advertising, the use of visual tropes such as image, symbol, motif, or visual metaphor carries a specific denotation and instantly recognizable cultural or political meaning to the audience. Logo, icon, colour, and slogan are the major identities of every political party; these visual elements are rigorously used in advertising. In Southwestern Nigeria, the use of two fingers as a symbol of victory was extensively adopted as it was mostly attributed to the gesture of one of the prolific political figures in the region – Obafemi Awolowo. Awolowo's visual imagery remains one of the most recognizable in Nigeria's political landscape. To gain acceptability, some Nigerian political actors adopted a respected and accepted individual in the present or past political landscape to adopt the style, apart from the political style of governance, a lot of politician, especially in recent time has equally embraced the physical attributes of Obafemi Awolowo such as dressing – inculcating the *agbada* style, *fila* (cap), eyeglasses, and the two finger style were adopted in their photoshoot for campaign adverts (Plate 3). This is to gain sympathy and electoral favour from the core followers of Awo, as he was popular and largely accepted in the South-West political landscape.



Plate 1: President Buhari campaign poster in Igbo Traditional Attire. Source: BBC NEWS Online.



Plate 2: President Bola Tinubu in Igbo Traditional Attire. Source: People Gazette Nigeria.

Nigeria is a complex country socially, politically, and economically. To advertise in such a political terrain, it requires a deep sense of creativity and psychosomatic reasoning. For political actors and visual communication designers to be able to convey the political message successfully in such a political landscape, the designer's attention is not solely on the aesthetics of the advert, but also on using the elements to gather emotion, influence voter perception and decision-making because political advertising is not always neutral and is very dynamic (Plate 4). The use of icons and symbols is a popular method in Nigerian political advertising; the use of party logos,

signature attire (*aso ebi*), or specific campaign props in Nigeria is intentionally leveraging visual tropes to circumvent complex text and communicate directly with voters' emotions, cultural memories, and collective identity.

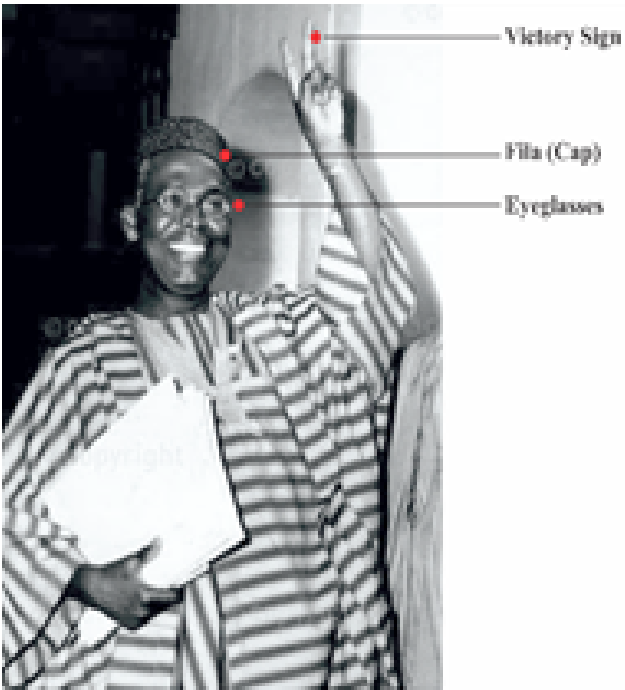


Plate 3: Obafemi Awolowo,
Source: Adapted from
Proudly Yorùbá, Facebook, 2026.



Plate 5: NDC Logo, Source: ndcnigeria.com, 2026



Plate 4: Nigerian Political Advert, Source: QZ.com, 2026



Plate 6:APC Next Level Logo,Source: X APC Nigeria, 2026



Plate 7: Tinubu's Logo, CorelDRAW Illustration,
Source: The Author, 2026

Logo in politics is the use of visual tropes or icons by a political party, political movement, or candidates to represent their values, identity, and campaign goals; it often blends imagery, typography, national colours, and memorable objects. This political visual identity is usually conceptualized by graphic designers and forms a major part of the electioneering process. In 2026, less than a year to the 2027 Nigerian general election, Peace Movement Party (PMP) challenged the Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC) for identity theft. PMP allegedly challenged the NDC for stealing its logo identity (Plate 5), and demanded that the party should be deregistered by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), NDC denied the allegation and the case was challenged in court. This demonstrates that a visual object as minute as a logo is very important for every political party and political advertising, which can also lead to a severe problem if care is not taken.

Infusion of typography and symbols is another common style in political advertising. The NDC logo consists of letters and an icon (which symbolizes victory or peace). The Next Level logo (Plate 6) also juxtaposes symbols with texts. APC used the logo for the second-term campaign of the former President Muhammadu Buhari in 2019. The typography in the design is a bold, straight, and non-ornamental font which symbolizes boldness and a straight path, while the red arrow was creatively used to complete some letters (V and part of X). The previous slogan used for the election of President Buhari in his first election (2015) was Change; coming 2019, the campaign slogan changed to Next Level with visual elements with thematic meaning that depicted progression, continuity, development, and consolidation. The colours used are Nigeria's national green and warm red, symbolizing growth, patriotism, and party identity.

Bola Ahmed Tinubu's signature icon, which is usually on his caps and later adopted by his political admirers, features a broken shackle symbol, which iconographically symbolizes breakthrough, freedom, the fight against injustice, and liberation from political and systemic hardships like poverty, ignorance, and disease (Plate 7). The icon reflects Bola Tinubu's

historical alignment with pro-democracy struggles and anti-military junta resistance during the 1990s NADECO era. The icon has become a rigorous campaign identity not used by Tinubu alone; many political candidate have incorporated the icon in their campaign materials and branding items, such as caps (face cap and fila), shirts, *agbada* (Nigerian traditional wear), notebooks, souvenirs, wristbands, among others. Other icons that are prominent in the Nigerian political landscape include: umbrella, broom, human figure(s), books, trees, crops, animals, farm tools, lamp, candle, farm tools, handshake, and finger sign, among others.

The Use of Typography and Colour in Political Advertising as Instruments of Persuasion, Canvassing, Cultural Appeal, and Propaganda

Typography is one of the essential elements of political advertising; text is used to form the campaign, catchphrase, slogan, motto, and other rhetorical elements in letters on the advert. Just as language is crucial in political communication, the use of text to communicate political ideas and campaign promises in visual form also plays an important role in political advertising. Catchphrases and slogans are powerful instruments for voter mobilization, ideology framing, identity creation, and familiarization in Nigerian politics, using both local and other languages for emotional appeals to shape public perception and drive political desire.

Language is a powerful tool in political discourse, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal communication. Politicians use rhetoric, metaphors, and cultural references to simplify complex ideas and appeal to voters' emotions. In Nigeria, codeswitching between English and indigenous languages enhances authenticity, while symbols like the APC's broom (unity) and PDP's umbrella (protection) reinforce party identity (Udofia, 2023).

Over the years, political actors have employed several carefully crafted slogans and phrases to complement the imagery and sometimes form

propaganda in campaign adverts. Odebunmi and Babajide (2020, as cited in Anjorin-Ojewole et al., 2025) argue that political slogans serve as a medium for power projection, where identity markers are strategically embedded to establish dominance and legitimacy. As Akinseye (2023) notes, slogans are not just words but ideological statements that communicate party values, national aspirations, and power structures. These slogans are either formal or informal, consisting of English, pidgin, and other indigenous languages, which are crafted to arrest emotions by incorporating national and local issues. Some of the slogans used in recent electioneering period include: Power to the People by Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Change by All Progressive Congress (APC), Papa, Mama, and Pikin/Forward ever (Labour Party), Education for all (NNPP), *Aghala Nwannee ya* (Be your brother's keeper) by All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), among others. Several other informal slogans that have generated much debate in the political landscape include *Otoge*, *Emilokan*, *Oyo un pe o!*, *We no dey give Shishi*, *Imole De*, *Eko E Dide*, City Boys Movement, Village Boys Movement, Edo no be Lagos, BATified, Buharist, Obident, Atikulate, Kwankosiya, etc.

The use of typography and colour in political advertising is a significant aspect in persuasion, canvassing, cultural appeal, and propaganda. Typography, usually referred to as font or typeface, is the art and technique of arranging letters, words, and text to communicate effectively. It encompasses font type, style or character, size, weight, spacing, alignment, hierarchy, and overall visual presentation. Typography and colour are among the most potent visual communication elements in political advertising. Beyond their aesthetic functions, these visual elements also operate as persuasive strategies that shape public perception, reinforce ideological messages, evoke emotional responses, and influence voting behaviour. In political campaigns, carefully selected typefaces, colours, and their arrangement communicate meaning even before voters read the textual content. Colour psychology plays a central role in political communication because colours trigger emotional, psychological, and cultural responses. Political parties and candidates

deliberately adopt consistent colours to reinforce identity. Their tactical deployment contributes expressively to persuasion, canvassing, cultural identification, and propaganda.

Typography and colour are indispensable components of political advertising because they extend beyond aesthetics to become strategic tools of visual persuasion. They establish candidate credibility, enhance message recall, attract voter attention, express cultural identity, strengthen party branding, and facilitate propaganda through emotional and symbolic communication. Plates 8 and 9 are campaign adverts of a particular candidate at different times and different positions. Plate 8 is a campaign for the Lagos West Senatorial election in 2019, while Plate 9 was for the gubernatorial election in 2023. The candidate contested under different parties and different names. The usage of Chinedu is very likely to persuade the Igbo electoral vote block in the senatorial district, while switching to Gbadebo, which is a Yoruba name, was used when aspiring to become a governor; this is purely to associate himself with the majority Yoruba ethnic group in Lagos State.



Plate 8: Rhodes Vivour Campaign Poster in 2019
Adapted from Nairaland Forum, 2026.



Plate 9: Rhodes Vivour Campaign Poster in 2023

@sama_on_point, 2026.

The imagery presented in the political advertisements equally reflects two distinct ethnic identities through costume, language, colour representation, and cultural symbolism. At the denotative level, the advertisements depict political candidates dressed in culturally identifiable attire, accompanied by bold typography, carefully selected colour palettes, and party insignia that dominate the visual composition. The candidates' names are rendered in large, bold typefaces, establishing a clear visual hierarchy that immediately directs the viewer's attention to the political personality before other supporting elements. Such typographic emphasis functions not merely as a design choice but also as a persuasive strategy for reinforcing candidate recognition and recall within the electorate (Van Enschoet et al., 2008).

Similarly, the slogan "*Èkó E Dìde*" (meaning Lagos, wake up) is prominently positioned within the advertisement to command immediate visual attention. From a pre-iconographical perspective, the phrase is distinguished through contrasting green and red typography, making it the dominant verbal element after the candidate's name. At the iconographical level, the Yoruba language evokes indigenous identity and establishes cultural proximity with the target audience,

particularly Yoruba-speaking voters in Lagos State. Within Yoruba political discourse, the expression "*Èkó E Dìde*" functions as an awakening call, symbolizing collective renewal, civic responsibility, and political mobilization rather than merely serving as a campaign slogan.

At the iconological level, the colour division of the slogan into green and red transcends aesthetic adornment. Green predictably signifies Nigeria colour, growth, agricultural prosperity, renewal, and hope within Nigerian political symbolism, while red often symbolized courage, sacrifice, urgency, and political determination. These colour associations are not arbitrarily assigned but are historically embedded within Nigerian political party identities and campaign traditions (Panofsky, 1955; Chandler, 2017). Their deployment within the advertisement therefore operates as a deliberate persuasive device intended to stimulate emotional engagement and strengthen ideological identification with the candidate.

The overall composition demonstrates a carefully structured visual hierarchy in which the candidate's portrait occupies the primary focal point, followed sequentially by the campaign slogan, party logo, symbolic colours, and supplementary campaign information. This arrangement ensures that viewers first establish an emotional connection with the candidate before processing ideological messages embedded within the accompanying visual signs. Such visual tropes corresponds with the propaganda principle of transfer, whereby positive cultural values and familiar ethnic symbols are transferred onto the political candidate to enhance credibility and public acceptance (Lasswell, 1927; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). It also reflects elements of identification propaganda, whereby political actors deliberately align themselves with the cultural/ethnic identities, and aspirations of particular voting communities.

Nevertheless, alternative interpretations remain possible. While Yoruba language and indigenous symbolism may primarily function as ethnic identification for Yoruba voters, audiences outside the linguistic community may simply perceive them as regional branding or political localization rather than explicit ethnic mobilization. Likewise, green and red may

simultaneously signify party identity, campaign aesthetics, or regional symbolism depending on the viewer's cultural background and political affiliation. These multiple readings reinforce Panofsky's assertion that visual meaning extends beyond observable forms and is ultimately conditioned by historical knowledge, cultural conventions, and social context.

A comparison with other Nigerian political advertisements further supports this interpretation. Whereas several presidential campaign advertisements employ English-language slogans to appeal to a national electorate, Lagos-based campaign materials frequently incorporate Yoruba expressions, indigenous attire, and local cultural symbols to establish regional identity and political affinity. Consequently, language, typography, colour, and imagery collectively operate as interconnected iconological devices that transform political advertisements from simple campaign materials into culturally embedded instruments of persuasion and propaganda. Their effectiveness lies not only in their immediate visual appeal but also in their capacity to activate collective memory, shape subconscious attitudes, reinforce political identities, and construct enduring ideological impressions within Nigeria's culturally plural democratic environment.

Table 1: Some Nigerian Political Parties'
Colours and their Symbolic Meaning

POLITICAL PARTY	PALETTE	COLOUR MESSAGE According to each political party
ACCORD (Accord Party)	<i>Yellow, Green, White</i>	Peace, justice, inclusiveness, and National development.
ADC (African Democratic Congress)	<i>Green, Black, White, Light Brown</i>	Agricultural wealth, strength, peace, zeal, and energy.
APC (All Progressives Congress)	<i>Green, White, Blue, Red</i>	Progressive governance, change, hope, development, and prosperity.
APGA (All Progressives Grand Alliance)	<i>Green, White, Black</i>	Vigilance, regional pride, and self-determination.
LP (Labour Party)	<i>Red, Green</i>	Worker solidarity, transformation, equity, and human development.
NDC (Nigeria Democratic Congress)	<i>Royal Blue, White, Warm Red</i>	Victory, strength, trust, stability, and peace.
PDP (People's Democratic Party)	<i>Red, White, Green</i>	National shelter, unity, peace, and agricultural vitality.

Table 1: Some Nigerian political parties' colours and symbolic meaning.
Source: Researcher's compilation, (Wale Ridwan, 2026)

Table 2: Visual Tropes Coding Matrix

PLATES	VISUAL TROPES	DENOTATION	CONNOTATION	PROPAGANDA DEVICES	IMPLIED EFFECT
Plate 1	Campaign Poster	Election Poster	Leadership / familiarity / credibility	Plain Folks / Transfer	Personal trust / political legitimacy
Plate 2	Photograph	Photograph of candidate	Leadership / familiarity / credibility	Plain Folks / Transfer	Appear humble / ordinary / inclusive
Plate 3	Photo Illustration	Obafemi Awolowo image/ Freedom sign	Freedom / victory / Yoruba political identity	Transfer	Ethnic political mobilization

Plate 4	Campaign Billboard	Two major contestant adverts	Rivalry / electoral competition / political choice / contestation	Testimony / Transfer	Giving democratic choice of selection / comparative framing
Plate 5	Party Logo	Official party Icon	Political identity / victory / peace	Transfer	Party recognition identity
Plate 6	Campaign Symbol / Typography	Next Level Icon in two colours	Moving to the next level / Political renewal	Glittering Generality	Trust canvassing / giving hope
Plate 7	Candidate's Signature	Candidate Icon	Breakthrough	Glittering Generality	Persuasive visual hierarchy
Plate 8	Indigenous Poster	Candidate wearing traditional Igbo attire.	Youthfulness / confidence / cultural identity / competence / approachability	Plain Folks / Transfer	Align the candidate with a particular cultural / social affiliation
Plate 9	Indigenous Poster	Indigenous typography and imagery	Cultural ethical affiliation / wake up / urgency / civic	Plain Folks / Transfer	Ethnic affiliation / cultural belonging / acceptance

Table 2. Analytical Matrix of selected Nigerian political advertisements and icons showing visual tropes, denotative and implied connotative meanings, propaganda techniques, and their intended persuasive effects.

Source: Developed by the researcher from selected political campaign advertisements using Panofsky's Iconological Framework (Wale Ridwan, 2026).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on Erwin Panofsky's Iconology Theory (1939); this gives a systematic framework for interpreting the deeper meanings entrenched in visual objects. Panofsky proposed that visual tropes should be analyzed through three levels: pre-iconographical description, which identifies the visible and formal elements of an image; iconographical analysis, which interprets conventional symbols and their recognized meanings; and iconological interpretation, which uncovers the core cultural, historical, ideological, and political significance of the visual illustration in the political adverts. Political advertisements consist of visual elements such as candidate imagery, party logos, colours, typography, icons, gestures, and representational elements deliberately arranged to persuade and influence electorates' opinion. While these visual elements possess instantaneous appeal, they also convey broader ideological narratives and possibly propagandistic meanings. The theory allows exploration beyond the literal appearance of the adverts to reveal the values, beliefs, and power structures embedded within them.

It provides a logical lens through which political advertisements can be examined as visual tropes that reflect social realities, cultural identities, political ideologies, and persuasive communication strategies. The theory also provides a robust framework for exploring the denotative, connotative, and ideological dimensions of political adverts, situating them within Nigeria's broader visual culture and democratic discourse.

Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research approach using an interpretive research design. The qualitative method is applicable because it seeks to explore meanings in symbols and ideological messages embedded in political advertisements. Data are obtained from purposively selected political adverts (posters, billboards, campaign items, and social media political advertisements). These visual tropes were selected based on their significance to the objectives of the study and their richness in symbolic, cultural, and artistic content. The collected data are analyzed using Panofsky's three-tier iconological framework, starting with the description of observable visual elements, followed by the interpretation of conventional objects, and lastly, the examination of the deeper

ideological, cultural, and political meanings. This systematic method allows the study to explain how visual tropes, such as icons, imagery, colour, typography, composition, and symbols, function as instruments of persuasion, political popularization, voter mobilization, and propaganda narrative.

Table 3: Table Contains Political Visual Tropes used

Advert / Image	Candidate/ Party	Election/ Year	Office Contested	Medium	Source	Retrieval date	Reason for inclusion
Plate 1	President Buhari (APC)	2015	President	Print (Poster)	BBC NEWS Online	14 th June 2026	Cultural meaning
Plate 2	President Bola Tinubu	2025	Incumbent President	Photography (JPEG)	People Gazette Nigeria	14 th June 2026	Cultural meaning
Plate 3	Obafemi Awolowo (UPN)	1979	President	Photography (PNG)	Proudly Yorùbá, Facebook	24 th July 2026	Symbolic interpretation
Plate 4	APC & DPD	2019	President	Billboard	QZ.com	28 th July 2026	Tactical in advertising
Plate 5	NDC Logo	2026	General Election	JPEG Logo	ndcnigeria.com	28 th July 2026	Logo controversy
Plate 6	APC Next Level Logo	2019	President	JPEG Logo	X, APC Nigeria	23 th July 2026	Iconographic meaning
Plate 7	Bola Tinubu	2023	President	Corel Illustration	The Author	22 th July 2026	Iconographic meaning
Plate 8	Rhodes Vivour (PDP)	2019	Senate	Print (Poster)	Nairaland Forum	22 th July 2026	Persuasive technique
Plate 9	Rhodes Vivour (LP)	2023	Governor	Print (Poster)	BARON EL'SAMA	22 th July 2026	Persuasive technique

Table No	Number of Parties	Dominant colour(s)	Dominant messages
Table 1	7	Green and red	Peace, agriculture, development

Table 3 analyses: Posters: 3, logos: 3, photography: 2, billboard advert: 1.
Colour table: 1 (consisting of 7 political parties)

Conclusion

Visual arts have become a crucial element of Nigeria's modern political advertising and propaganda. These visual tropes serve as crucial tools for political branding, popularization, persuasion, voter mobilization, and ideological communication. Through the tactical use of icons, imagery, colour, typography, symbols, composition, and cultural motifs, political advertisements convey messages that extend beyond their literal connotations and are designed to shape public perception and which may influence electoral behaviour. Most icons used Nigeria political adverts are symbolic and rich in meaning; APC uses a broom, which is regarded as an object of cleansing, and PDP uses an umbrella, an object which is for protection. By adopting **Panofsky's Iconology theory**, this paper establishes that political advertisements are visual tropes whose deeper ideological, sociological, and cultural meanings can be

analytically interpreted through iconological analysis.

It also establishes that visual communication has become a strategic instrument for propagating political ideologies and possibly influencing electoral behaviour in Nigeria. Through the deliberate use of symbols, colours, imagery, typography, and other visual elements, political adverts communicate persuasive messages that often transcend verbal content. Nigerian political advertisers often employ symbolic imagery, catchy phrases (typography), and use of vibrant colours; a large number of Nigerian political parties have either green or red as their party identity, also, cultural trope is a dominant trend in the Nigerian political advertising. The study further demonstrates that these visual strategies are not merely aesthetic devices but ideological tools that shape public perception, reinforce political identities, and mobilize voter support. Understanding the visual language of

political advertising is therefore essential for fostering informed democratic participation and advancing scholarship in visual communication and political discourse. The study will contribute to scholarship in visual communication, art history, political communication, and media studies by highlighting the significant role of visual elements in constructing political narratives and influencing democratic processes. Also, a critical understanding of visuals in advertising is essential for strengthening media literacy, promoting informed electoral participation, and advancing scholarship on political visual culture in Nigeria.

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Note. The political images and campaign adverts were retrieved from publicly accessible online/social media platforms and are used solely for scholarly elucidation, analysis, and educational purposes. Some of the images have been enhanced or adapted by the researcher where necessary to improve visual clarity without altering their substantive content.