Article QR

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DOI:	https://doi.org/10.32350/sri.31.03
History:	Received: February 05, 2025, Revised: March 10, 2025, Accepted: April 15, 2025, Published: May 20, 2025
Citation:	Oyebode, M. O., Adelakun, L. A., Egenti, G., & Johnson, H. (2025). News media propaganda and intricate conflict outcomes: A case study of 2023 general elections of Oyo state, Nigeria. *Sociological Research and Innovation*, *3*(1), 46–75. https://doi.org/10.32350/sri.31.03
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Conflict of Interest:	Author(s) declared no conflict of interest

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A publication of
Department of Sociology, School of Social Sciences and Humanities
University of Management and Technology Lahore, Pakistan

News Media Propaganda and Intricate Conflict Outcomes: A Case Study of 2023 General Elections of Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria, as a nascent democracy, is yet to be fully entrenched in standard election. Contestation for media space contributes to the escalation of political conflicts. Scholarly works on propaganda as a political campaign tool lack contextual analysis of episodic electioneering and elections in Nigeria. This study examined the nexus between conflict and propaganda in the news media during the general elections of 2023. The study utilized triangulation methods; such as questionnaire, in-depth interviews and content analysis for data collection. Questionnaire was administered to randomly selected 400 respondents, while in-depth interviews were purposively conducted with state publicity representative of All Progressive Congress and Peoples Democratic Party in Oyo State. Forty-eight propaganda media messages of the two political parties were content analysed. The discussion of findings is anchored in the Value Change Theory of mass communication and Verbal Aggressiveness Theory of conflict. The findings revealed that hate-speech, fake news, repudiation, labelling and other tactics heated the political scenario during the 2023 general elections and contributed to violent attacks. Social media was used without traces of professionalism. It is recommended that media literacy be taught in schools and out of school settings to ensure mediation and moderation in the media usage patterns, particularly for political purposes.

Keywords: conflict, electioneering, hate-speech, news media, propaganda

Introduction

Many societies have embraced the values of democratic rule. For instance, in Nigeria, representative democracy has been embraced since return to civil

rule in 1999. Representative democracy becomes the available options to many nation-states because Plato's conception of a Democratic Republic as a city-state is no longer feasible due to population explosion and the expansive geographical nature of modern sovereign states (Anowai, 2019). Representative democracy, also known as electoral democracy or indirect democracy, operates on the principle that elected representatives govern the state on behalf of the people. Holding free and fair elections is a major characteristic of representative democracy and it ascertains the legitimacy of a government. Such elections are conducted by a statutorily empowered electoral management body (EMB). In most democracies, candidates for elections contest under registered political parties, though in some countries, independent candidature is allowed.

During elections, candidates campaign to share their manifestoes with the electorate. Apart from house-to-house campaign, the dispersal of people in time and space has warranted the use of traditional mass media (television, radio, print) and new media (social media, video games, YouTube, Face-book, email, websites, blogs) platforms as veritable tools for reaching the electorate. These mass media may be classified further as either entertainment media or news media (Adelakun & Oyebode, 2020). The meeting points for both the electorate and politicians have been the news media (newspapers, radio, television and social media). Since the advent of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, preceded by the liberalization of broadcasting since 1992, electioneering on radio channels in Nigeria has been characterized by hate-speech and propaganda, usually encoded in fabricated lies or fake news (Njoku, 2018).

Nigeria has chequered electoral history, marked by shifting political vagaries, colonial legacies, and military interventions. Theoretically, between 1954 and 1999, ethnicity, colonial influences, and emerging class formations shaped electoral laws, practices and outcomes (Aliyu, 2015). Early elections saw ethnic groups weaponize ethnic-based political parties, name-calling, stereotyping and hate-speech in the traditional media outlets to compete for dominance of political power (Olabamiji & Okonye, 2019). Nigeria is highly diverse, with over 250 ethnic groups, and politics is often influenced by ethnic and regional identities. Political parties and voting patterns frequently align with ethnic and religious affiliations, reinforcing division and sometimes fuelling conflict. This rivalry resulted in state

weakness and political instability, which the military used as justifications to disrupt civil rule three times.

In the digital age, the threat of disinformation and misinformation campaigns in Nigeria looms large, casting a long shadow over the electoral landscape. The proliferation of false or misleading information, particularly through social media and other digital platforms, can warp public opinion, sow confusion, and undermine the credibility of electoral processes (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Interestingly, social media have also become a tool for political engagement, helping to amplify youth voices and challenge the status quo. In order to ensure good and decent campaign atmosphere during electioneering, Nigerian Electoral Act, 2022 states in Section 92 subsections thus:

(1) A political campaign or slogan shall not be tainted with abusive language directly or indirectly likely to injure religious, ethnic, tribal or sectional feelings.

(2) Abusive, intemperate, slanderous or base language or insinuations or innuendoes designed or likely to provoke violent reaction or emotions shall not be employed or used in political campaigns.

(3) Places designated for religious worship, police stations, and public offices shall not be used— (a) for political campaigns, rallies and processions; or (b) to promote, propagate or attack political parties (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2022)

Contrary to the above provisions, social commentators and scholars averred that during the 2023 General Elections, the Nigerian media environment was saturated with misinformation, disinformation and sensational news and campaign messages (Bello, 2023). Thus, rendering the democratic exercise vulnerable to distortion and manipulation.

Statement of the Problem

News media platforms have grown exponentially as a viable space for political expression and participation globally (Omotayo & Folorunso, 2020). In Africa, for example, new media have been used to serve public interests and promote social justice, as evidenced by their role during the Arab Spring in 2011. Social media have also benefitted political movements in selling political images, policies and identities, culminating in vibrant political activism (Adelakun & Oyebode, 2020).

Nigeria possesses one of Africa's most vibrant and professional media that largely enjoy high level of press freedom. There are many newspapers and magazines, television stations and AM and FM radio stations operating in the country. For instance, according to Nigeria Democratic Report (2023), over 740 broadcast stations are currently functional across Nigeria. New ones are being licensed by the National Broadcasting Commission on an annual basis. Thus, as the fourth estate of the realm, the ubiquitous Nigerian press is keeping surveillance on the government as well as the superstructures and institutions of government. The mass media in Nigeria are found to have kept surveillance of the polity with varying degrees of success and failure (Oyebode & Adelakun, 2020).

The liberalisation of the media space has led to a large number of journalists, political players and media users utilizing different platforms to disseminate misinformation and unfounded propaganda at some points in Nigeria's public life (Inobemhe et al., 2020).

The Nigerian press is often accused of glamourising tragic issues, which have the potential to provoke vengeful actions in the audience and lead to social unrest as the audience detests impunity of the economic and political elites (Adelakun, 2017). This reaction occurs because sensational media themes in reaction to conflict episodes have the capacity to escalate conflicts rather than reduce them. The news media has the power to escalate or worsen group conflicts through unethical practices. Dissemination of the elimination praxis or prejudice or revenge mission by the media has, in the past, incited people to commit crimes against humanity, as seen in Rwanda (Thompson, 2007). In particular, Nigerian politicians often phrase their public statements in ways that personalize and polarize the issues, increasing the likelihood that their messages will gain media coverage or appeal (Olabamiji, 2014). In that regard, political issues get prime placement and framing in everyday life publication or broadcasting. The Nigerian media is thus seen as society's "superstructures" transmitting ruling class ideology and perpetuating capitalists' ideological beliefs. Allotment of greater air time, space, or primacy to political happenings in the Nigerian polity has been condemned by social critics.

The Nigerian media, especially the privately owned outlets, have often been accused of political slanting. These include editorial bias, advertorials restriction, advertisement over-pricing for opposition parties, uncontrolled phone-in programmes, harassment of guests and subjective reporting

(Njoku, 2018). In Africa, issues around brown envelop syndrome, solo ownership of the media organisations, political intimidation and perceived elitism have undermined professional practice and marginalised common citizens from fair-play journalism (Skjerdal, 2010).

The assumption of this study is that recent scholarly works on propaganda as a political campaign tool lack in contextual analysis in relation to episodic electioneering and election entrepreneur in Nigeria. A thematic drawback in existing propaganda scholarship is that it has ignored intricacies of conflict in propaganda in the political space. Also, content and discourse analyses methods used by media and communication researchers to study propaganda in the realm of hate speech have largely left gaps in empirical findings that can be applied to the most affected recipients of the effect of propaganda and hate speeches. These approaches make it more difficult to articulate media audience-oriented remedies for repressing propaganda as a misinformation strategy in politics. Thus, injurious issues that emanate from propaganda and other marauding political attacks in the media space require empirical studies via interrogation of media audience, political gladiators as well as news media workers. How political propaganda becomes media agenda and how such agenda engenders political conflicts in a polity call for further empirical studies. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the nexus between conflict and propaganda in the news media during the general elections of 2023.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the different media platforms used in Oyo State, Nigeria by politicians during the 2023 election;

- To ascertain the intended purposes of political gladiators in using propaganda during the 2023 general elections in Oyo State, Nigeria;

- To explore how the politicians and the electorates perceive the nature of propaganda used in compliance with the contents of the 2022 Electoral Act;

- To evaluate the different forms of conflict generated by the use of propaganda during campaign for the 2023 general elections in Oyo State, Nigeria;

- To establish perceived influence of the conflicts generated by the use of propaganda tools on post-election milieu of Oyo State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

- What are the different media platforms used in Oyo State, Nigeria by politicians during the 2023 election?

- What are the intended purposes of political gladiators in using propaganda during the 2023 general elections in Oyo State, Nigeria?

- How do the politicians and the electorate perceive the nature of propaganda used in compliance with the contents of the 2022 Electoral Act?

- Which different forms of conflict were generated by the use of propaganda during campaign for the 2023 general elections in Oyo State, Nigeria?

- What are the perceived influences of the conflicts generated by the use of propaganda tools on post-election milieu of Oyo State, Nigeria?

Literature Review

Review of Some Concepts

Media and News Media

The media refers to all means of communication used to inform, create awareness, educate, socialize and entertain audiences, whether they consist of individuals or large groups in a specific location or across vast areas. The media is, thus, a conduit through which voices, perspectives and lives are brought into the public sphere. According to Paul and Rai (2021), the media refers to traditional mass communication system as well as other technologies that are means of generating and communicating information including. These tools are used to store, transmit, and deliver information or data from one object to another in mediated human speech. With advancement in technology, digital media have rented the air. Digital media is used to describe the interplay between technology, texts, images, and sounds in the context of information production and consumption (Lindgren, 2017).

News media are a genre of journalism that reports events and issues of public interest, emphasizing the timely and relevant aspects of those events and issues (Tuchman, 1978). The news media are a form of mass media that

focus on delivering news to the general public. The news media include newspapers, television, radio and other electronic media.

Politics

The concept of politics is multifaceted and permeates various aspects of societal organization and governance structures. Adelman (2024) defines politics as the processes, activities, and relationships involved in the acquisition, distribution, and exercise of power within a given social system. In the same light, politics is seen as the pursuit and exercise of power, as politics is inherently concerned with the acquisition, distribution, and maintenance of power, whether it be political, economic, social, or cultural (Lasswell, 1927). Politics plays a central role in mediating conflicts and competing interests within society, as well as determining the allocation of scarce resources (Withers, 2024). It provides the plank which enables individuals, groups, and communities to articulate their interests, concerns, and aspirations, and to seek representation and influence within the decision-making processes established by a state. Thus, politics enables people to aggregate their interests and pursue them in contestation with the interests of other contending forces within a polity.

Election

An election is defined as the formal process of selecting a person for public office or accepting or rejecting a political proposition by voting (Webb et al., 2024). Election is a phenomenon that enables representation in government, enabling citizens to hold their leaders and representatives accountable and to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives by casting their votes for candidates of their choice or rejecting at polls representatives that have failed to secure their interests.

Political Communication

Esser and Barbara (2023) define political communications as the exchange of information and communication between, the public and the media. Modern political communication involves both established and non-established communicators, mass media and social media, public and personalised communication, integrating all of these elements. Political campaign is a form of political communication. According to Albert (2007), a political campaign specifically refers to messages and efforts designed to win widespread support for a specific cause, candidate, or idea, usually in the form of winning an election.

Propaganda

Propaganda is the instrumental use of language to spread an ideology with the aim of swaying listeners' perception of reality. According to Malhan and Dewani (2020), propaganda is the version of the Latin word 'propagare,' which means to disseminate. Therefore, propaganda refers to the act of distributing, propagating, or endorsing specific beliefs. The derogatory connotation of the word was further accentuated by its use during World Wars I and II in the early 20th century. Malhan and Dewani (2020) opined that labelling anything as propaganda often implies dishonesty or deception in todays world. However, where propaganda is seen in the context of persuasion to effect behavioural and attitudinal change terms such as public affairs, press release and public diplomacy are used. However, propaganda is merely a tool, much like a chainsaw; strong and dangerous by nature, but it can be employed for good or bad purposes.

Users of propaganda often believe that the audience will receive and act on their messages without proper scrutinising or interrogation. More often than not, they belong to the hypodermic needle theorists. Hypodermic needle theory suggests that media messages are injected directly into the brains of passive audiences (Folarin, 2002). In this wise, information flow is said to be linear and having unlimited desired effect on message recipients. However, the dominant intellectual tradition embraces a "limited effects" notion of what communication "does" or else are more concerned with the more slippery concept of ideology (Anderson, 2021).

Political Conflict

Conflict is generally defined as a struggle for scarce resources. Following this perception, political conflict is seen as incidence of struggle that manifests in tensions, disagreements, contestation or violence among individuals, groups, or institutions over the acquisition, distribution, or exercise of power, resources, or ideological differences within a given political system (Wallensteen, 2015).

Political conflict arises from contestation for limited political space and the desire of many to claim it. Political conflict has also been described as power struggles arising from the competition for political power, influence, and control over decision-making processes, often involving rivalries among political parties, factions, or elites (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2019; Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Political conflict may be in form of electoral

violence. Electoral violence refers to the use or threat of physical force, intimidation, or coercion during electoral periods, aimed at influencing the outcome of elections or disrupting the electoral process. Recourse to violence during political discredits the legitimacy of democratic leadership. It sometimes leads to entrenchment of dominant violent groups who may marginalize and exclude the majority. Outcome of violent political conflict is often anaemic to representative democracy.

Empirical Review

Technological advancements have made easy access to collecting, refining and distributing information in all the nooks and crannies of a polity no matter how vast. Specifically, digital technology is shaping political campaign as it offers divergent platforms through which politicians can amplify their voices. Spanning from the era of Web 1.0 and email services to the Web 2.0 era marked by blogging and interactive technology, political parties and their candidates have package political messages with a variety of styles and language in a bid to sway public opinion and earn votes. Muswede (2022) submitted that "due to the proliferation of digital media, political communication processes have drastically shifted away from traditional formats to more adaptable and personalised platforms linked to digital citizenship." People now design personalised websites, X account and blogs to disseminate political messages before, during and after elections to either sell ideas, candidates or counter messages by their political opponents.

Contestation for media space is becoming tough. Karekwaivanane and Msonza (2021) asserted that political arena has been ravaged by proliferation of internet-based publishing and citizen journalism or succinctly put digital (social) media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Scholars have earlier described this development as mediatisation of politics (Asp, 1986). Thus, abundance of opportunities is now available for every citizen to participate actively in political discourse, offer self for service, aggregate opinions, criticise political office holder and make suggestions.

From a global perspective, Ekman and Widholm (2022) asserted that the rapid advancement of digital communication technology and the rising ubiquity of social media platforms have caused a significant change in the structural circumstances of political communication making political

players to crosse the lines between political communication and journalism and news. In the same vein, Ojekwe (2016) averred that over the past 20 years, political advertising in Nigeria has experienced tremendous growth. The reason behind this is the growing realisation among political parties and their candidates that advertising may effectively raise candidates' profile as a better brand. Thus, the internet and related technologies have a profound impact on business, culture, social interactions, movements, politics, and the media, which defines this modern era (Esser & Barbara, 2023). In the words of Suemo et al. (2024), the media have been used to escalate or defuse tensions as a powerful force in forming public opinion. They further reiterated that in today's globe, media propaganda is a major problem, particularly in nations where political unrest is prevalent.

The media are not angels. They are prone to make errors of omission or commission. Errors of fact, bias and misguided news judgment are some of the weaknesses of the media profession globally. In an investigation carried out by Olabamiji and Okonye (2019), out of the 600 social media messages sampled 48% contained dysfunctional use during the 2015 general elections and they found that the highest rate (57.2%) during electioneering heated the polity with overt and covert conflicts. This aligns with the thesis that politicians often turn the press to a battle ground for political struggle and supremacy.

Propaganda has been linked to political communication. Bello's (2023) study found that between 1900 and 1910, the New York Times started to use propaganda as a different term and frequently linking it to political movements and violent acts while retaining its previous meanings as political advocacy and religious propaganda. According to Ameh (2023), propaganda is spread through many platforms of the international mass media, such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, books, and film. Essentially, this kind of propaganda entails the deliberate application and selection of ideals, pictures, customs, and norms that are likely to further propagandists' goals. While the media are expected to expose and criticize weak political structure, abuse of power, and unwholesome social practices, other considerations are said to have relegated these roles to the background. Ojo et al. (2021) in their study concluded that the Nigerian media have often been hijacked by political office holders for propaganda, and this results in maladministration, socio-economic problems, and moral decadence that pervade every sector of the polity.

Political conflicts breed an environment of insecurity and instability, deterring investments, hampering economic development, and compromising the provision of essential public services (Wallensteen, 2015). Electoral violence (a form of political conflict), for example, undermines the integrity of elections, instal incompetent people in public office and rape the electorate of their right to choose their leaders.

Theoretical Framework

Verbal Aggressiveness Theory (VAT)

Verbal aggressiveness describes a person's attitude toward using aggressive language to confront situation of frustration. Verbal aggressiveness theorists argue that aggressiveness as an innate tendency of man can be triggered in the course of interactive communication with ambivalent factors in a particular situation. Infante and Wigley (1986) argued that the willingness to want to argue or one's level of argumentativeness determines how messages are decoded and responded to. Those who can sustain long argument maintain their cool while those will short argumentative capacity result to aggression. Thus, those with low argumentative trait are easily frustrated, high in verbal aggressiveness and easily pugnacious. Devyatkin et al. (2014) opined that value priorities are thought to be a basis of communicating within the group. Communication with ingroup and outgroup may thus take different forms depending on how receptive a group is to argument. Hamilton (2012) noted that aggressive language has offensive, vulgar, opinionated, and rude characteristics which are known conflict triggers.

This theory is apposite for this study because politics competition for public office during elections often comes with all kinds of propaganda within and outside of political parties to sway public opinion. How much individuals or political parties can sustain argument has become a weapon to win followers and the electorate. Individuals' or parties' levels of argumentativeness determine how they respond to their opponents. Thus, this theory is apt in explaining both verbal and physical aggressions that may result from propaganda.

Value Change Theory

Value Change Theory is an offshoot of Psychodynamic Model. The proponent of the theory is Ronald Inglehart (1990). The theory of value change is based on two key hypotheses:

- The deficiency hypothesis: Scarcity in a socio-economic environment determines the choice of subjective value.

- The socialization hypothesis: persons basic values largely reflect the conditions of upbringing.

Value is taken here as a yardstick that directs action, usually based on the benefits that the individual alternative courses of action promise, so that one can decide on the alternative course of action with the greatest expected benefit. Hence, individual ranks the benefits of societal value against his action. In relation to political communication, this theory relates to the choice of value an individual makes while communicating with the desire to influence the behaviour of others. Folarin (2002) averred that Value Change Theory is anchored on determining the comparative advantage that one value system has over other related values when encoding your message. In order to ensure peace, every society has a set of values which is called ethics.

In relation to this paper, the theory will stress the need for Nigerian mass media to change orientation against promotion of wrong value systems. It is the opinion of the theorists that the mass media should move away from negative political propaganda news contents (Sobowale, 1985). The theory is germane in proposing ethics of communicating among politicians and the media in order to avoid pull-down syndrome while advancing values that benefit the political and socio-economic milieu during electioneering.

## Methodology

Research Design

This study used mixed methods to address the multifaceted variables of the study. Content analysis and in-depth interviews were used to explore the different propaganda tools used in Oyo State, Nigeria by politicians during the 2023 elections. In-depth interviews were conducted to find out the intended purposes of political gladiators in using propaganda during the 2023 general elections in Oyo State, Nigeria. Survey with the use of a set of questionnaire and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were used to examine respondents' opinions and perceptions in relation to research questions 3, 4 and 5.

Area of the Study, Population and Sample Size

Oyo State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. It is in the Southwest geo-political zone. According to Seye (2024), there are currently 33 local government units recognized by the 1999 constitution, dispersed among five geopolitical zones. The population of Oyo State in the 2006 Census was 5,580,894, while the 2023 estimated figure was put at 7,512,855 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

Figure 1

Location of Oyo State in Nigeria
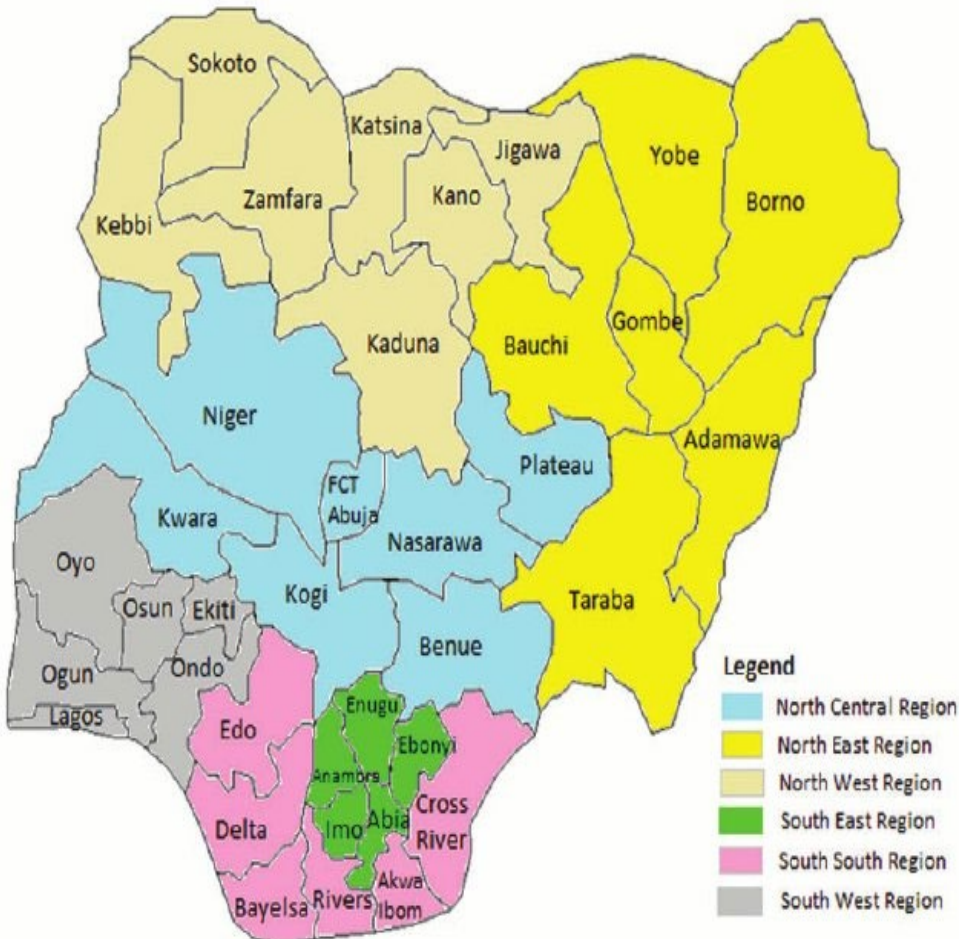
Note. Source: Adapted from Gayawan et al. (2025)

Figure 2

Map of Oyo State showing Local Government Areas
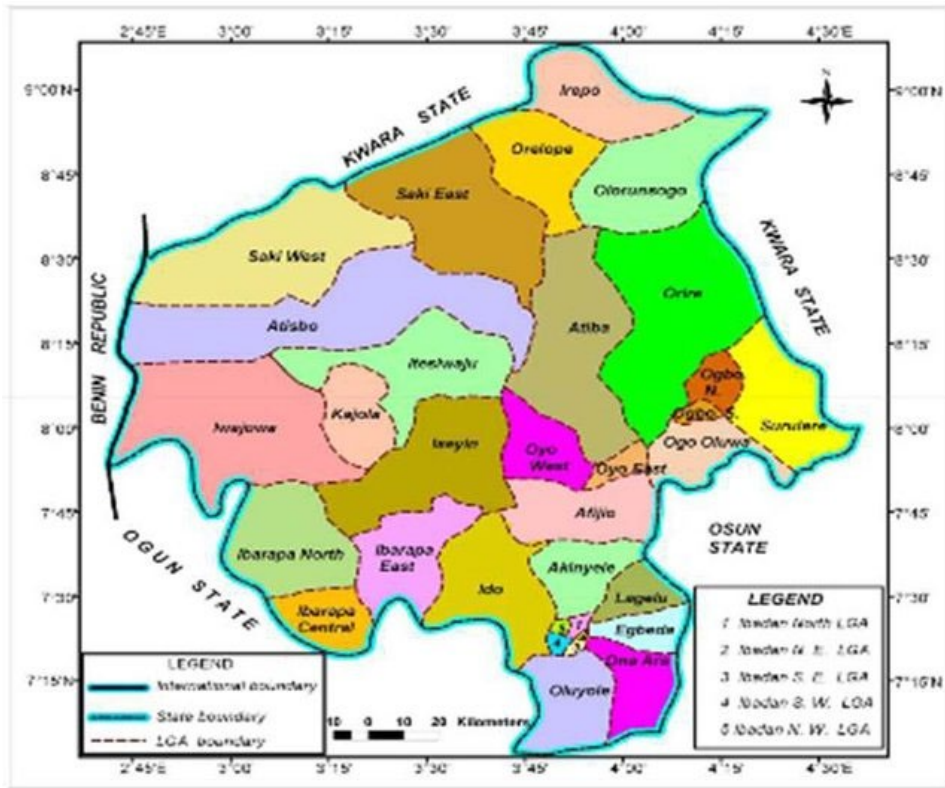
Note. Adapted from Olagunju et al. (2017)

Purposive sampling was used to select two major political parties, All Progressives Alliance (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) that are vibrant in Oyo State. However, random sampling was used to select 400 respondents to the questionnaire across major cities in the state. The figure of 400 was arrived at using Research Advisors (2006) from the estimated population of 7,512,855 of Oyo State in 2023.

Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data was obtained through a specially constructed questionnaire administered to 400 respondents at their localities. It was obtained though in-depth interviews conducted with the representative of APC and PDP.

Sources of Data

Primary data were collected through questionnaire and interviews while secondary data were obtained from political parties' press releases in their websites for content analysis. Articles in journals, books and internet also form part of the secondary sources.

Data Collection Process

The team members were trained thoroughly to ensure consistency and uniformity in the distribution and retrieval of questionnaire copies. A pre-test of the questionnaire was carried out to ensure clarity and relevance. The researchers managed the distribution and collection of the questionnaire. Interviews were directly conducted by the researchers and recorded on tape for transcription.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, including frequency and mean scores, were presented in tables. News media contents from the two leading political parties that keenly contested for the gubernatorial seat of the Oyo state in the 2023 election, were analysed. The primary data were generated from APC and PDP. A sample of 48 online media contents that reek propaganda and also related to the 2023 gubernatorial election in Oyo state were purposively selected among numerous other for content analysis. Interviews were also conducted with PDP and APC representatives on 26th and 27th of August 2024 respectively. For qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to interpret data from interviews to answer research questions numbered one and two.

Ethical Consideration

The study prioritised obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring they understand the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw at any time without repercussions. Letters were written to seek permission from the two major political parties' leaderships to conduct this research. Having obtained permission from the leaders, the representatives were interviewed and they made their websites links available for use. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Thus, participants identities were protected in reporting t he findings to ensure that

their responses remain private and secure. Thus, those interviewed from the political parties are referred to as representatives.

Data Analyses

Different Media Platforms Used in Oyo State, Nigeria by Politicians During the 2023 General Elections

The interview responses and content analysis of political propaganda in the2023 general elections in Oyo State show that social media and radio are the most frequently engaged during political campaigns by the political parties considering the overwhelming advantages of radio, particularly in reaching out to the aged population in Oyo state. Radio took the lead among the conventional media in term of usage frequency for political campaigns in Oyo state. According to the representative of PDP:

> We use radio, social media, blogs, print media, the internet, and other grassroots media outlets that are friendly to us, though I won't mention them here. Radio is the most commonly used medium because it's very effective in reaching people in Oyo State, especially the older generation.

He further refuted the allegation that his party was favoured by the state media stations because the gubernatorial aspirant of the party is the sitting governor of the state:

> … Not at all. There are rules and regulations set by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation that ensure fairness. For example, if one party makes a claim on air, the station is required to give the other party a chance to respond. No, no one is silencing anyone. The world is now a global village with technology that allows people to report live from their communities. We have about 250 political wards, meaning I have around 350 Public Relations Officers who help me convey information.

APC response on the issue of media use for political campaigns is not much different. The representative of the party affirmed that:

> We use various media radio, television, newspapers, and social media but radio is our preferred choice because of its wider reach, especially among the older population. However, we also tailor our media strategy, using social media to engage younger audiences. ….. I can say that while some media outlets may have biases, the

APC doesn't own any. We are aware, however, that the PDP has relationships with certain media outlets. For example, the governor has given gifts like SUVs to radio presenters, which could be seen as a way to favour them.

Other media platforms that were commonly used for political propaganda during the 2023 general election in Oyo state are:

- Email involving the dissemination of regular email newsletters with news stories or blog posts.

- Instant/Live Streaming services which involve the liveblogging of sports events, press conferences, breaking news stories on YouTube Live, Facebook Live or Instagram Live.

- Forums or bulletin boards which involve the creation of message boards or virtual forums to accommodate site visitors by providing an avenue for discussions within the site.

- Databases hub which involves the hosting of searchable public databases on sports, election results, public health etc. on the site for visitors to access.

Intended Purposes of Political Gladiators in Using Propaganda during the 2023 General Elections in Oyo State, Nigeria

Demanding the reasons in interviews why politicians and parties use propaganda particularly during the 2023 general elections in Oyo State, there are mixed responses to this question by the two political parties. The representative of PDP concurred that propaganda is part of politics and the purpose is to sell a candidate or a party while discrediting others in the political marketplace. APC on the other hand considers propaganda as exchange of banter to sway public opinion, make campaign interesting and expose the weaknesses of opposition candidates. PDP justified it stand by revering to global political practices: "Propaganda is a crucial part of political campaigns. Even in the United States, campaigns involve propaganda, and the Electoral College rarely intervenes. It's a powerful tool for making campaigns more engaging and persuading to voters".

Standing on its perspective to propaganda, the party does not consider propaganda during campaigns as issues that should attract litigations. The

party according to the representative has never taken any legal action against media propaganda during political campaign. He reiterated that:

> ……… no, but we do respond. In Oyo State, we've never taken legal action because no one has a monopoly of language. For example, if someone calls us foolish, we might call them stupid. The issue arises when propaganda targets individuals. In those cases, the person may take action for bullying or defamation, but our party hasn't taken anyone to court.

APC on the other hand does not consider media propaganda beneficial to healthy politics climate. Despite that the representative of the party agreed that politicians do engage in banters to a certain tolerable extent, he discredited the use of media propaganda gimmicks during political campaigns as he reiterated:

> As politicians, we sometimes engage in banters, which is seen as normal in the political landscape. While this happens, we generally tolerate such exchanges and don't resort to reporting to security agencies or the courts, as long as its within acceptable limits. As a trained journalist, I understand the importance of truth. I speak and write for the party, avoiding propaganda. Propaganda, by definition, is half-truth, and we reject that. We aim to be truthful, though we do try to neutralise any propaganda used against us to prevent further harm.

When referred to one of the media propaganda-invested press releases of the party during the 2023 electoral campaigns to hypothetically justify the PDP proposition that media propaganda is part of politics, the justification was:

> No, that claim is based on facts. It was included in a press release and backed by data from the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), which oversees monthly allocations. The figures were also supported by the State's internally generated revenue (IGR) report. These are verifiable facts, and the governor has not refuted them.

In any case both parties confirmed that the exchange of banters during campaigns does not harm personal relationship with one another as such relationships grow beyond competitiveness that is based on political interest. For instance, PDP representative affirmed further:

We don't take these exchanges personally because, in most cases, politicians are friends or have attended the same schools before entering politics. Our responsibility as politicians is to engage with the electorate, persuade them, and win elections, not to get involved in personal conflicts.

Table1

Respondents' Perceptions of the Nature of Propaganda Campaign Messages in the News Media during the 2023 General Elections in Oyo State

Constructs	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
Campaign messages are sensational	378	1	5	3.85	0.94	Favourable
Campaign messages abuse sensibility of audience	378	1	5	3.39	1.12	Favourable
Campaign messages are pleasant, attractive and give hope to the audience	378	1	5	3.49	1.15	Favourable
Campaign messages merely caricature opposition parties and candidates to deride them	372	1	5	3.46	1.08	Favourable
Campaign messages rarely convey electoral promises	368	1	5	3.09	1.23	Favourable
Campaign messages enhance the image of parties and candidates	378	1	5	3.85	0.93	Favourable
Campaign messages merely boost the egos of parties and candidates	380	1	5	3.74	0.96	Favourable

Note. Above 2.5 mean value is favourable to the construct. Below 2.5 mean value is unfavourable to the construct

The analysis on the nature of propaganda campaign messages in the news media during the 2023 General Elections in Oyo State depicts that the respondents perceived the campaign messages as highly sensational. Sensationalism of the media contents has been an important issue that defines the effects and the influence of the media contents. With a mean score of (3.85), the respondents also perceived that the campaign messages enhanced the image of parties and candidates.

Less prominent in the respondents' perceptions of the political campaign messages in the media is the idea that the campaign messages were pleasant, attractive and gave hope to the audience. The respondents are not entirely convinced about this effect of the campaigns. Their scepticism hangs on the

moderate mean score (3.49) in the statistics of the respondents' perceptions. The statistics further indicate that the campaign messages abuse sensibility of the audience in the similar proportion with the degree of its attractiveness and the leverages to the audience hope.

In the interviews conducted both the PDP and APC representatives agreed that, sometimes, campaign messages are sensational, campaign messages abuse sensibility of audience. They also acknowledged that the messages were not always pleasant, attractive and give hope to the audience, caricature opposition parties and candidates to deride them and merely boost the egos of parties and candidates. They, however, claimed those messages emanated most of the time from candidates' handlers. On the contrary insisted that campaign messages from their offices convey electoral promises and enhance the image of parties and candidates.

Table 2

Forms of Conflicts Generated by the Use of Propaganda during Campaign for the 2023 General Elections in Oyo State, Nigeria

Constructs	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
Verbal abuse	372	1.00	5.00	3.89	0.834	Favourable
Psychological trauma	376	2.00	5.00	4.00	0.864	Favourable
Physical combat	380	1.00	5.00	3.86	0.908	Favourable
Violent protest	372	1.00	5.00	3.87	0.908	Favourable
Retaliatory spirit	376	1.00	5.00	3.69	1.058	Favourable
Killing and maiming of politicians and their supporters	378	1.00	5.00	3.83	0.972	Favourable
Arson	378	1.00	5.00	3.70	1.088	Favourable

Note. Above 2.5 mean value is favourable to the construct. Below 2.5 mean value is unfavourable to the construct

An analysis of how propaganda campaign messages contributed to conflicts during the 2023 general elections in Oyo State depicts heightened verbal abuse. One of the most profound effects of these propaganda messages was the psychological trauma experienced by the opposition candidates leading to loss of confidence and withdrawal from public space. Psychological trauma was identified as the most significant impact of propaganda on political actors. The psychological trauma aggravated by verbal abuse among the loyalists of the political parties triggered violent protests against the offensive statements and media portrayals. These protests often escalated into physical combats, killing and maiming of

politicians and their supporters, and incidents of arson. It is interesting to note that the statistics of the respondents' perceptions of the constructs are in that degree of order, going by the mean values of each construct. Retaliatory spirit of the offended parties sustains persistent political crisis, even to another political dispensation.

Spreading false information or predicting election results can cause anxiety, confusion, and unrest. APC representative affirmed the fact that propaganda distorts the truth and causes anxiety. "It's a harmful tool that disparage opposition, but we in the APC avoid using it. Instead, we rely on research to select the best candidates. Of course, conflict is inevitable when people vie for the same position", said APC representative.

Both political parties confirmed that there were propaganda-induced crises during 2023 election in Oyo state, but none of the parties considered itself guilty of such. Each shifted the blames onto the other. Confirming that propaganda misleads voters and stirs up tension, each of the political parties has divergent views on the propaganda usage and its effect. While PDP considered it as part of democracy, APC considered it an alien to free and fair electoral process. According to the APC representative, "Yes, there were attacks on our members, and billboards were vandalised. Our members were assaulted and injured, making us feel like we were being targeted."

Table 3

Perceived Influence of the Conflicts Generated by the use of Propaganda Tools on Post-Election Milieu of Oyo State

Constructs	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
Distrust	372	1.00	5.00	4.04	0.898	Favourable
Hatred	378	1.00	5.00	3.96	0.949	Favourable
Legal suit	370	1.00	5.00	3.63	1.064	Favourable
Intra-party feud	370	1.00	5.00	3.92	0.904	Favourable
Inter-party disgust	374	1.00	5.00	3.97	0.872	Favourable
Suspicion	372	1.00	5.00	4.05	0.833	Favourable
Animosity	376	1.00	5.00	3.86	0.953	Favourable

Note. Above 2.5 mean value is favourable to the construct. Below 2.5 mean value is unfavourable to the construct

From the analysis of the variable depicted on Table 3, most of the respondents considered suspicion as the most frequent influence of the conflicts generated by the use of propaganda tools on post-election milieu

of Oyo State. Every party and candidate suspects and read meanings into the campaign messages of one another. The suspicion on one another leads to distrust even within a party let alone among the competing parties. The respondents perceived inter-party disgust, hatred for other parties and their allies as well as intra-party feud in that order of magnitude influence as the end-products of the suspicion and distrust the parties and the politicians have in one another. All these feuds continue to create animosity in the politics as perceived by the respondents and only very few of the cases eventually lead to legal suits as noted in the statistics presented in Table 3 above.

Discussion

Nigeria's democracy has evolved since military rule ended in 1999, but electoral violence and fraud remain persistent concerns. Political parties increasingly use news media to spread their messages to different audiences through traditional and new media channels. The growing access to internet-enabled phones and data corroborates the increase in the trend of social media adoption and usage. The political parties are aware of the vast audience reach offered by new media which is key to their political permutation and as such, they capitalised on the advantage. By and large, this finding aligns with Olabamiji and Okonye's (2019) assertion that mediatisation of politics in Nigeria has emboldened politicians and office holders to patronise the media (both traditional and new) for different reasons.

None of the interviewees agreed that propaganda is meant to inflame the political atmosphere. The conflict generated are, thus, seen as unintended consequences. However, the interview responses establish that there is strong relationship between the use media propaganda in political communication and political-motivated conflicts. These findings corroborate Adelakun's (2017) submission that those who patronise media typically promote issues that conform to their interests which are sometimes parochial.

While the respondents' perceptions of the campaign messages indicated that a significant proportion of the campaign messages merely boost the egos of the parties and candidates that sponsored them in the media to corroborate why they go to the media as earlier mentioned, they underscored that the campaign messages rarely convey electoral promises.

This shows that most of the campaign messages in the media are not issue-based but rather full of trajectory of political propaganda and the dictates of the power that be as earlier emphasised in the empirical discussion of Ameh (2023), Bello (2023), and Olabamiji and Okonye (2019), indicating the promotion of the issues that conform to the interests of the power structures of which the media serve.

Propaganda in political communication was at the root cause of political crises during 2023 election in Oyo state, evidences abound that internal party disagreement and intolerance among parties fuelled by hate-speech caused crises. Evidences from the contents of the political messages, and the empirical analysis of the opinion survey attest that media propaganda weakens political tolerance, creates insensitivity of the oppositions, hurts respect for dignity and obliterates peace-invested campaign messages, all fanning political crises. Nwankpa et al. (2024) have equally posited that disinformation through social media cause disaffection. This outcome relates to the postulations of verbal aggressiveness theorists that attack in the media will provoke violent reaction.

The analyses of the respondents' perceptions of the influence of the conflicts generated by the use of propaganda tools on post-election milieu of Oyo State corroborate the empirical deduction from the interview analysis. The parties confirmed that political propaganda in the media and the exchange of banters is part of politics the world over and it is tolerable to a certain extent, however, this is being over-stretched in Nigeria. Thus, embrace of value change theory in packaging campaign messages is advocated because the theory abhors political lie, deception, dishonesty and inflammatory messages which are premised on wrong sense of value that can heat a polity.

Conclusion

The pervasive use of unethical propaganda messages has disrupted social harmony and heated the polity in Oyo State. The influence of propaganda on social milieu as shown a negative trend in Oyo State. However, while the patterns of propaganda framing of political messages are linked with political-infested crises, politicians in Oyo state still consider propaganda as part of political imperative which enlivens political interests and consciousness in the state. This study also reiterated the trend of the new media influence in communicating political messages and its

implications on the ethical and legal violations in the information dissemination, linked to the genesis of major political intolerances and crises in the state.

The study centralised its conclusion on the premises that political propaganda was used by the political elites with low concern for the sensitivity of the audience during 2023 general election in Oyo state. This virulent verbal contest is akin to the postulation of verbal aggressiveness theorists. The framing of the political propaganda particularly on the news media contributed to major political intolerances and crises during the 2023 election in the state. Thus, INEC, civil society organizations, activists, and media practitioners have crucial roles to play in holding politicians accountable for their utterances

This study is sociologically significant as it helps understand the implications of unethical use of propaganda during elections and its capabilities to disrupt social harmony, peace and good governance, ultimately harmimg society. The society as a social entity will be sick when its political structure is engulfed in acrimony. This study, thus, called attention to this sociological phenomenon of propaganda. In line with value change theorists, it is recommended that political gladiators should move away from negative political propaganda news contents. It is, thus, recommended that elements of media and information literacy should be embedded in both university and secondary education curriculum to ensure that the ethics of media use and information management are inculcated in the Nigerian citizenries. This will allow responsible and responsive media use and consumption. In addition, short-term certificate and diploma courses in media and information literacy should be mounted by higher institutions in collaboration with International Media and Information Literacy Institute (UNESCO Category II Institute) and similar other non-governmental agencies that promote media literacy for the political class. Future studies on the effect of the use of propaganda on voting pattern in Oyo State is desirable.

Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to major cities of Oyo State, as most rural areas were not accessible due to time constraint. Apart from questionnaire administered on the general populace and politicians,

interviews were granted by authorised representatives of political parties. However, other executive members declined to participate in the interviews.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

Funding Details

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