

## TELEVISION AS A MEDIUM OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING DURING ELECTIONS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper is an evaluation of the influence of television political advertising on electorates' attitude toward voting in Anambra State. The study, among others, aims at finding out whether exposure to television advertising influences respondents' preference for advertised candidate. The study is anchored on the agenda setting and reinforcement theory. Survey research method was adopted while the questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection. The findings show that exposure to television advertising influences voters' preference for advertised candidates. The findings also show that television advertising generates quicker recall of advertised candidates in voters. Based on the findings, the paper concludes that the influence of television political advertising on electorates is such that it makes the voters to recall the advertised candidate and that it persuasively generates in voters, preference for the advertised candidate. The paper, therefore recommends, among others, that political parties in Nigeria should give due attention to the use of television for the dissemination of political activities.*

**Keywords:** Advertising, political advertising, electorates, Attitude and Voting

### INTRODUCTION

Generally, advertising is crucial to the modern day business; ranging from the hawkers of tomatoes, to the multi-national companies that engage in the production of goods and services, advertising is a veritable tool with which to have and keep buyers. To succeed in this ultimate goal of keeping customers to their goods and services, the advertisers employ a lot of mouth watering promises. As a branch of marketing communication, advertising has many branches which over the years have generated a lot of new postulations, conceptions and school of thoughts by different practitioners and scholars in the field. One of such branches which have found a comfortable home in the field of advertising is political advertising. Politicians engage the service of different advertising agencies; as a matter of fact, people champion the need for better leadership and express these needs in form of advertising and manifestoes; conference rallies from ward to ward, billboard, writings, granting and publishing interviews among others. The essence of political advertising is not for the buyers- the electorates to just come and buy the product, but to appeal to their emotions, in order to win their votes. However, unlike commercial product, they do not have to buy the candidates, but come out to cast their votes for him, to top in the election and this is only done by eligible electorates within the constituency as political advertising is not targeted at every one, but those eligible to vote. Koga (2006, p.37) notes that:

In politics, the market is likewise a group of people who share a common interest, need or desire, which may be satisfied by the election of political candidate. However, unlike commercial products, they do not have to afford him. A political market is composed of

those in the candidate's district of influence, who are eligible to vote, those people are called constituency voters.

In modern times, political advertising is one of several ways politicians and political parties mobilize the electorates. Political advertising can be done in several ways, such as television programmes, radio, newspapers and display of candidate's portraits, with several promising and persuasive inscription on the billboard, magazines and even the new media of communication. Part of the basic objectives of this political advertising is to gain attention of the electorates and for this reason, political advertising sometimes involves orthodox strategies to achieve its aim.

Nigeria witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number and style of political advertising in the last national and state elections held in 2011. Most of the political parties in the land mounted one form of political advertising or the other, to bring to the attention of the voting public, the parties' political philosophy (manifesto) as well as the parties' contestants for the various elective offices in the country. Many political office seekers also used political advertising to market themselves to the prospective voters. Several media of political advertising were employed during the electioneering campaigns. Most notable of these media include radio, television, Internet, newspapers, magazines, billboards, posters and others. Political parties and their flag bearers used these media, particularly the television, to their advantage in a bid to out-witting one another in the 2011 elections battle.

Advertising is a big business; it is not free of charge. It is a business that involves huge capital. So, several millions of naira were spent by the politicians and their parties in the 2011 elections in advertising. Giving the huge sums of money involved in advertising of the magnitude of state and national coverage and the frenzy with which party faithful and their political parties embarked on it, the following barrage of questions task a concerned mind: Does advertising truly influence the electorates to vote for the advertised candidate? Does a party that advertise more win more elective posts in an election? Is advertising part of the success story of those who win elective positions in 2011 election? Are the huge sums of money voted into advertising justifiable, considering those that won and lost in the last elections? Can we truly ascribe electoral victory to effective or intensive advertising campaign? Is advertising a sole factor in determining electoral victory? Or is it a contributory factor to electoral success? Therefore, this study evaluates the influence of political advertising on electorate's attitude towards voting in Anambra State, Nigeria, with a bias on television as a medium of advertising.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study has the following objectives:

1. To find out whether exposure to political advertising on television would influence respondents' preference for advertised candidate.
2. To assess whether television advertising stimulates quicker recall in voters than any other form of advertising.
3. To ascertain whether television ads persuade electorates more than any other type of advertising to vote for the advertised candidates.
4. To examine the opinion of the electorates on whether television advertising is the best form of political advertising.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Following the research objectives, the under listed research questions are posed to guide the study:

- I. Does exposure to television advertising influence respondents' preference for advertised candidate?
- II. Does television advertising stimulate quicker recall in voters than any other form of advertising?
- III. Do television ads persuade electorates more than any other type of advertising to vote for the advertised candidate?
- IV. Is television advertising the best form of political advertising?

## The Concept of Advertising

Advertising has to do with informing the people about the existence of something, so as to draw attention to it; it is giving of notice, so as to draw attention. Advertising is unique and special and if anything is to be known about the existence of a product, commodity, item, good, service or a political candidate, then there is need for advertising. Advertising describes any form of communication, which is principally aimed at promoting the sales and patronage of goods and services. Advertising as a planned communication is both an act and art of communication. Individuals and government endeavour to communicate their goods, products or services, as the case may be, to the audience (Asemah, 2011).

Arens (2008, p.7) says that advertising is the structured and composed non-personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products, services and ideas by identified sponsors, through various mass media. The definition given by Arens is closely in line with that of Dominick (2007, p.321), which says that advertising is a form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services, usually paid for by an identified sponsor. Advertising intends to promote the sales of a product or service and also to inform the masses about the highlights of the product or the service features. It is an efficient means of communicating to the world, the value of the product or the service. Advertising utilises different media to reach out to the masses and uses different types of appeals to connect to the customers across the globe.

Advertising is the process of persuading potential customers to buy products or promote its services. It is the branch of marketing that deals with communicating to customers about products, brands and services. Advertising is a form of communication used to persuade an audience (viewers, readers or listeners) to take some action with respect to products, ideas or services. Most commonly, the desired result is to drive consumer behaviour with respect to a commercial offering, although political and ideological advertising is also common. Advertising messages are usually paid for by sponsors and viewed via various traditional media, including mass media such as newspapers, magazines, television commercials, radio advertisements, outdoor advertising or direct mail or new media, such as websites and text messages (Wikipedia, cited in Asemah, 2011).

## Political Advertising

Political advertising is one of the types of advertising that over the years has been used by politicians and their well-wishers to convince people to cast vote for them. Asemah (2010, p.20) avers that political advertising is used by politicians to persuade people to vote for them and it is therefore part and parcel of political process in Nigeria and any other democratic society. It is a very important source of communication for voters. It is the advertising that

involves political parties presenting candidates in order to win votes and be in power. Okoro (1996, p.18) notes that political advertising is a special type of advertising which calls for high strategic thinking and action initiative. It starts with the objectives analysis of the image and appearance of the candidate involved (in the case of human product) or the evaluation of the programme in respect of the issues at stake (in the case of political programme merchandising). Regarding the selling of the candidate to the electorate, it may involve matters like getting a new haircut or a new suit or assuming particular positions in religious matters. This way, the candidate talks, smiles, laughs, walks, etc, is very crucial (Okoro, 1998, p.18).

In the words of Kogah (2006), political advertising functions to communicate the attributes of the politician that relates to the constituent's needs and the candidate in turn gains the voter's confidence and votes. This way this "political product" is packaged, much like a commercial product. Political advertising comes up every year that election is to be conducted in every state of the globe. Political advertising is a form of marketing communication that is aimed at selling the candidate of a party to the electorate. Political parties now package their political candidates and sell to the people, so as to draw their votes. Modern politics is therefore, incomplete without political advertising. Political advertising encompasses all forms of advertising pertaining to building support for any and all political campaigns, including candidates running for office, ballot measures, political activism, etc.

As noted by Olujide, Adeyemi and Gbadeyuan (2010), political advertising is the use of media by political candidates to increase their exposure to the public. The extensive use of television and radio has supplanted direct appearances on the campaign trail, which was popularly used by politicians in the past five decades. Spot advertising is the most commonly used technique and it attempts to create a favourable image of the candidate and a negative image of the opponent. It links the candidate with desirable groups in the community and communicate candidate's stand on selected issues.

## **Elections**

Election is an important hallmark of enthroning and sustaining democracy in societies like ours. Umechuhwu (2004, p. 32) avers that election is paramount and highly significant in any given society. It is the time when leaders who pilot the affairs of a nation are elected. It is also the time when all the eligible voters exercise their rights as citizens to participate in the government. That is, the right to vote and to be voted for. Also writing on the importance of election, Umar, (2000, p.1) admits that elections give the people control over their governments by enabling them decide on who should be their law makers and decision makers. Hence election provides the electorates the opportunity to vote their representative into office for a particular length of time. An election can be seen as the process of selecting leaders through voting. According to Clotefelters and Prysby, cited in Lawal (2003, p.127) election can be described as mechanism which permits the largest possible part of a population to influence major decisions by choosing among contenders for political office. Lawal (2003) further states that election performs the important functions of leadership selections; it enables the electorate to indicate, and by implication, underscore their preference of a particular leader or leaders who they consider worthier than others for a specified public office.

Okwodu, cited in Lawal (2003, p.126) defines electoral system as the process by which the citizens of a state vote, to elect people to represent their interests and opinions in government. Thus, for this purpose, the territory of the state is normally divided into various electoral constituents, the inhabitants of which vote for one of the various candidates to become their

representative. Election is the celebration of the fact that in final analysis, sovereignty resides with them and they have the last say on the conduct of affairs of the nation.

### THEORETICAL GUIDE

The agenda setting theory and the reinforcement theory have been chosen to provide the framework for this study. The agenda setting theory was proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/1973. The major assumption of the theory is that the media set agenda for the public to follow. The theory holds that most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most of the issues we discuss, are based on what we have read, listened to or watched in different mass media. The media make us to think about certain issues; they make us to feel that certain issues are more important than others in our society. As posited by Wimmer and Dominic (2000), the theory on agenda setting by the media suggests that the public agenda or what kind of things people discuss, think or worry about is powerfully shaped and directed by what the media choose to publicise. The theory is relevant to the study in the sense that television sets agenda for what the electorates discuss or think about in any election process. Thus, television can be used to persuade the people to accept a particular party or candidate during elections.

Reinforcement theory was propounded by Joseph Klapper in 1960. According to Dominick (2005, p. 545), reinforcement means the strengthening or support of existing attitudes and opinions. The theory is of the idea that the mass media have little or nothing to do with people's attitudes, choice making and behaviours; rather, the main effects of the media are the reinforcement of existing attitudes of the people. As it relates to political advertising, the theory holds that the electorates have their choice to make and the mass media can only contribute to strengthening this choice. The reinforcement theory tends to be useful in this research in the sense that it says that the media only reinforce pre-existing attitudes of the audiences.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

We are confronted with political advertising daily. Much of it is so subtle that we are not even aware of its political nature. Questions can nevertheless be raised concerning the effectiveness of political advertising, particularly in the print media as a tool of electoral mobilisation (Bovee and Arens 1994, P.744). On this, Wayne (1980, p.214-215) cites studies in the context of the 1940s USA which he indicated that:

The principal impact of the media was to activate predispositions and reinforce attitudes rather than to convert votes. Newspapers and magazines provides information, but primarily to those who were most committed. The most committed in turn, use the information to support their beliefs. Weeding out opposing views, they isolated themselves from unfavourable news and opinions that conflicted with their own.... With the bulk of campaign information coming from printed matters, voters, particularly partisan voters, tended to minimise cross pressures and to strengthen their own pre-existing judgments. In contrast, the less committed also had less incentive to become informed. They maintained their ignorance by avoiding information about the campaign. The format of newspaper and magazines facilitated this kind of selective perception.

Bovee and Arens (1994, p.744) also note that:

In political campaigns, the market is likewise a group of people who share a common interest, need or desire, which may be satisfied by the election of a political candidate. However, unlike commercial products, they do not have to afford him. Therefore, the



political market is composed of those people in the candidate's district of influence who are registered to vote. These people are called constituents.

As an organised effort which seeks to influence the decision making process within a specific groups in democracies, political advertising can also be seen as the use of an advertising campaign through newspapers, radio commercials, television commercials etc, to influence the decisions made for and by groups. According to Ansolabehere and Iyenger (1995), political advertising is a form of campaigning used by political candidates to reach and influence voters. It can include different several media and span several months over the cause of a political campaign. Unlike campaign finance, there are very few regulations governing the process and many candidates use various techniques to influence their intended audience (Ansolabehere and Iyenger, 1996).

Reacting to the various techniques used by political candidates/ parties for political advertising during elections, Ansolabehere and Iyenger (1996) identify the following two techniques to be the commonly used in political advertising:

### **Attacks Ad Techniques**

It focuses exclusively on the negative aspect of the opponent. There is no positive content in an attack advertisement; it is an advertisement whose message is meant as a personal attack against another candidate or political party. Attacks ads often form part of negative campaigning. An attack ad will generally, unfairly criticise an opponent's political platform, usually by pointing out his faults. Often, the ad will simply make use of innuendo. According to Ansolabehere and Iyenger (1996), attack ads usually identify the risk associated with the opponent; often explaining people's fears to manipulate and lower the impression voters have on the opponent, because attack ads have no positive content.

### **Contrast Ads**

Contrast ads contain information about both the candidate and opponents; the information about the candidate is positive while the information about the opponent is negative. Contrast ads compare and contrast the candidates with the opponent, juxtaposing the positive information about the candidate with the negative information of the opponent.

Political advertising plays a very crucial role in elections; through political advertising, the electorates are mobilised and effectively communicated with; to inform their voting choice. Commenting on its importance and use, Philips, et al (1999, p. 1) have this to say:

Irrespective of the type of election, there is always the need for political communication and mobilisation of the electorate by both the political parties and the candidates seeking offices. In most democratic societies, the general approach for achieving political communication and electoral mobilisation of citizenry is usually through political campaign.

Koga (2006, p.37) notes that:

In politics, the market is likewise a group of people who share a common interest, need or desire, which may be satisfied by the election of political candidate. However, unlike commercial products, they do not have to afford him. A political market is composed of those in the candidate's district of influence, who are eligible to vote, those people are called constituency voters.

Political advertising may take many forms; such as: documentaries, presentation of candidates profile, which may include candidates background in relation to birth, business, professional calling, public life, etc, each of these forms of communication directly allows a

message to be communicated directly to the electorate, particularly those of them who are eligible to vote.

### METHODOLOGY

The study employed survey research method. Baran (1999, p.350) writes that surveys are designed to scientifically describe phenomena and their relationships in the actual environment at a given time. Survey is appropriate for this study in that it is used for investigating attitudinal and behavioural change(s) in people in their natural setting. The population of the study covers all electorates in the 21 local government areas in Anambra State numbering 1,642,696 people (Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Anambra State Office, Awka). A sample size of 400 was chosen for the study based on Taro Yamani's formula of determining sample size:

Sample formula

$$S = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}$$

Proportionate allocation formula was used to determine allocation of sample to each of the three senatorial zones in Anambra State. Thus, Anambra North Senatorial Zone with a population of 600,096, got 146 sample allocation:

$$\frac{600,096 \times 400}{1,642,696} = 146$$

Similarly Anambra Central and Anambra South Senatorial zones got 132 and 122 respectively:

Anambra Central:

$$\frac{542,600 \times 400}{1,642,696} = 132$$

Anambra South:

$$\frac{500,000 \times 400}{1,642,696} = 122$$

The questionnaire was used for data collection and the technique for data analysis was simple percentage method expressed in table of frequencies.

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

**Table 1. Return Rate of the Questionnaire**

<i>Question</i>	<i>No. of Respondents</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Return and found usable	370	93
Not usable	16	4
Not returned	14	3
Total distributed	400	100

Table 1 shows that the return rate is 93% while the mortality rate is 7%. The return rate is higher than the mortality rate. The mortality rate of 7% does not affect the study because it is insignificant compared to the return rate of 93%. Thus, the copies were considered adequate enough to represent the population. The presentation and analysis of data that were obtained from the questionnaire was therefore based on the 370 copies that were returned and found usable.

**Table 2. Exposure to TV political campaigns influences respondents**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	292	79
No	58	16
Don't know	20	5
<i>Total</i>	<i>370</i>	<i>100</i>

Data on the above table show that 292 respondents (79%) agreed that they were influenced by exposure to political campaigns, 58 (16%) disagreed and 20 were neutral. This shows that exposure to television political campaigns influences respondent's preference for advertised candidates.

**Table 3. Respondents' view on the medium that stimulates quicker recall**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Television	150	41
Billboard	140	38
Radio	30	8
Newspaper	20	5
Others	30	8
<i>Total</i>	<i>370</i>	<i>100</i>

Data on the above table show that television stimulates quicker recall in respondents (n = 150 or 41%). However billboard is the second to television in stimulating quicker recall on voters (n = 140 or 38%). Radio has 8% (n = 30), newspapers 5% (n = 20) and other media such as handbills have 8% (n = 30). This shows that television stimulates quicker recall in audience.

**Table 4. Persuasive power of television advertising**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	200	54
No	100	27
Don't know	70	19
<i>Total</i>	<i>370</i>	<i>100</i>



Data on the table above reveal that that television is persuades electorates to vote during elections. 200 (54%) said yes, 100 (27%) ticked no while the remaining 70 (19%) ticked “don’t know”. The import of this is that television campaign is persuasive

**Table 5. Respondents’ opinion on whether television advertising is the best**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	152	41
No	150	40.5
Don’t know	68	18.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>370</i>	<i>100</i>

Data on whether television advertising is the best form of political advertising show that 41% (n=152) agreed, 40.5% (n=150) respondents disagreed while 18.5% (n=68) were neutral. This means that majority of the respondents believe that television advert is the best form of political advertising.

**Table 6. Responses on combining television with other media**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	280	76
No	90	24
<i>Total</i>	<i>370</i>	<i>100</i>

Table 6 shows the percentage distribution of respondents in terms of the need to combine television with other communication media for the purpose of influencing the electorate during elections. Out of the 370 respondents, 280 (76%) agreed while the remaining 90 (24%) disagreed. This shows that television has to be combined with other communication media.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings have clearly revealed that exposure to political campaigns via television could influence respondents’ preference for advertised candidates. The data generated in this study show that television is an important tool for carrying out political campaigns. The implication of the data in table two is that the importance of television as a tool for carrying out political advertising cannot be overemphasised. Thus political parties in Nigeria need to employ the television in the practice of political advertising and execution of political activities.

Findings show that television advertisements stimulate quicker recall in respondents. Respondents can recall candidates advertised through the television medium. This explains why most political parties and their agents make use of the television in their political campaigns. Findings reveal that television advertising persuades electorates as much as billboard advertisements do. This informs the reason why almost all the political parties and their agents as well as majority of the candidates run to these two media for campaigns and advertisements. Because television combines sound and pictures, its messages create an

indelible image in the mind of viewers, thus persuading them to vote for the advertised candidate. Findings of the study also show that television is the best form of political advertising. This is not unconnected with the power of the television to show it as it is saying it.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Television can be used to mobilise support for a party or a candidate during elections. This is because it is persuasive, informative and educative. Political parties and candidates need to use the television to carry out their political activities. The television could be used to generate support for political action, mobilise voters during electioneering campaigns and to ferret information to party faithful. It could be concluded that the impact of television political advert on electorates is such that it makes the voters to not only recall the advertised candidate, but also persuasively generate in them preference for the advertised candidate, a condition necessary to make the voters vote for the candidate advertised. The paper recommends that:

1. Political parties in Nigeria should give due attention to the use of television for the dissemination of political activities.
2. Television should be regularly used to carry out political activities. Communication is more effective when it is done on a regular basis.
3. There is the need for political parties in Nigeria to always combine different advertising strategies when carrying out political advertising. Testimonials could be combined with sloganeering to make an advert to be more effective.
4. There is need to also combine the television with other means of communication, especially interpersonal communication. The reason is because interpersonal communication brings the communicator and the audience together, in a face to face communication situation, thereby enhancing communication.

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