

INFLUENCE OF TELEVISION BROADCASTS ON VOTERS' CHOICE OF PARTIES: A STUDY OF 2007 NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: DR. STELLA A. ARIRIGUZOH

ABSTRACT

Because of television's wide popularity, political parties and their contestants have used it to reach and deliver various messages to a large number of people in order to advertise and promote themselves. Since television wields influence, these political institutions believe that canvassing from this medium would confer on them added advantages, especially making the voters to favour their points of opinion and consequently cast their votes for them. It is therefore nothing to be wondered at that politicians have vigorously engaged this medium to reach out to voters and to those who are sympathetic to their causes. They believe that a relationship exists between their appearances on television and electoral outcomes. Those campaigning for public offices assume television broadcasts influence the manner in which members of the electorate vote. This study sought to find out if the various pieces of broadcasts from television on the 2007 Nigerian presidential election influenced the choices of political parties that voters in Ado Odo/Ota made. When the various variables were subjected to statistical tests significant and positive relationships were found among all the variables testing to see if the respondents' exposure to television influenced their choices of the political parties that they voted for. It was discovered that indeed television broadcasts influenced these choices. Because the values were low, it was also found that there were some other underlying factors, like partisanship, that also influenced the choice of the voters.

KEY WORDS: Television, voters' choice, political parties, influence, presidential election.

INTRODUCTION

Television is a very popular mass media used to inform, educate, frighten, influence and entertain. Its ability to transmit words and pictures in seconds simultaneously to millions of people at once has made it a preferred choice of medium in political communication. These messages have incalculable impact on our thinking and consequent behaviour, including who we vote for. Television provides a link between the politicians and the electorate. Most voters get their information on the elections from television. Adanni (2005, p. 142) expounds that television plays important, often taken for granted, roles in the daily lives of the viewers because "it is a story teller; it tells stories to

most people most of the time. It is the wholesale distributor of images and forms the mainstream of our popular culture. Television is the nation's most common and constant learning environment. It both selectively mirrors and leads society, and some believe that television can affect behavioural patterns in the different social strata of the society...."

Politicians and their parties have information that they want these voters to have. Accordingly, they have overtly used it to pass across various pieces of information to members of the electorate in order to stimulate their political interests, stir their emotions or persuade them to take particular lines of actions. Of course, the summary of their messages is to lure the voters to see them as the preferred political party to be favoured with their votes during the election.

There is a relationship that exists between television broadcasts and election results. Television causes effects by what it decides to or not to show to the viewers. In this way, television can be used to influence the decisions of voters. Expectedly, television has swiftly reported the lapses and transgressions of political leaders therefore bringing them into the public gaze. Of course some men have been hurled to the ground following such television reports.

The Nigerian society is a democratic one. It has been running unbroken presidential elections, every four, years since 1999. Other presidential elections had earlier held in 1979, 1983, 1993. It is important to note that so far, Nigeria has not witnessed the running of independent candidates. Contestants run and campaign from specific political platforms. A vote for a political party is a vote for its candidate. A vote against a party is a vote lost to the party.

It is based on this backdrop that this study examined if television broadcasts was the major influence on voters in Ado-Odo/Ota on their choice and preference of parties voted for in the 2007 Nigerian presidential election.

INFLUENCE OF THE MASS MEDIA ON THE INDIVIDUAL VOTER

The basis of modern democracies is political participation by individual voters who are presumably informed. The mass media are key actors in the electoral process because they are channels of providing information on the parties, their manifestoes, the contestants and the election processes so that the voters can make informed choices. Reasoned choices means that the electorate knows the consequences of their actions. However, McNelly (1966, pp. 345-357) points out that the press cannot influence anybody that is not exposed to nor affected by its contents. For the media to influence the individual voter therefore, it means that the individual must be exposed to and consume the contents of the media. As Converse (1966, pp. 136-158.) points out, those who are most influenced by the media are either highly stable or highly volatile voters. The highly stable voters are those who have decided how to vote before the final weeks of an election campaign. They pay close attention to the media's coverage of the campaign because of their interest in politics.

Joslyn (1984) presents evidence to show that media influence is strongest for

undecided and independent voters because they do not have well formed opinions on politics. Therefore, they see media messages as a 'credible voting cue'. Miller (1991, pp. 2-3) says that the highly volatile group use the media as sources of new information to help in their voting choice. From his submission therefore, campaign advertising has more of a reinforcing rather than a persuading role for the stable voter and at least a guiding role for the volatile voter. Empirical evidence exists to support Miller's claims. Keeter and Zukin (1983), Patterson (1980), Cundy (1986), Devlin (1982, pp. 1-38) also find that for most voters the role of the media is one of reinforcing rather than changing existing likings. These authors also accent that party political advertising is especially important to late deciders and uncommitted voters.

Zaller (1991, pp. 1216) also takes notice that individuals with the least political interest and awareness are the most susceptible to media-induced behavioural effects. These individuals are less likely to seek information through the mass media because of their disinterest. They are the most likely to be affected by whatever new informational cues they receive, because their weakly formulated or non-existent political predispositions do not provide them with any evaluative defence.

It is interesting to note that it is this class of voters - the least interested and uninformed individuals in society- that represent the key to electoral outcomes because they are most unpredictable, most likely decide their vote choice at campaign peaks, most susceptible to mass media influence and the least likely to participate in elections. However, the individuals who are not politically naive, Arterton (1984, p. 4) points out that the media's primary role is to reinforce, not change, their predispositions, such they already have existing political loyalties, beliefs and information. Media effect is minimal on their voting attitudes and behaviour. As Graber (1984) and Entman (1989, p. 349) contend, any effect of the media on voting behaviour 'hinges on the interaction between audiences and messages'. Everson (1982, p. 99) emphasizes, 'No one' receives the messages of the media unaffected by predispositions'. Critical in those predispositions are the voters' prior political interest, awareness and loyalties. These are the background on which the media messages are interpreted. However, the media have significant influence where voters cannot employ their partisan loyalties as shortcuts to make decisions. In the studies of the American presidential primaries Graber (1989, p. 196) discovers that party members have to rely on the media to choose from among themselves the persons that will be the party's flag bearer.

Hybels and Weaver (2004, p. 611) explain that when a persuasive message is similar to our values, beliefs and attitudes, not only are we more responsive to this message but we are also more likely to accept the sender. Nevertheless, when the case is otherwise, we are less responsive to them. These authors say that we tend to be more positively responsive to the people who share our values. Do the makers of contents for the mass media share our similarities and consequently influence us?

The makers of contents for the mass media are the reporters, editors, producers and broadcasters. They help to shape realities. McCombs and Shaw (1972, pp. 176-187) say that in choosing and displaying what they regard as news, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play the important role of shaping political realities. Their readers learn

more about given issues and their importance from the amount of information contained in and the position of these news stories.

It is now commonly understood that the media have impact. Iyengar (1987, pp. 815-831); Entman (1989, pp. 347-370); Ansolabehere, Behr and Iyengar (1991, pp. 109-139) and Norris, Curtice, Sanders, Scammell and Semetko (1999) contribute that the media's impact is less about actively changing values and beliefs, for example, turning around a floating voter, than about determining what issues are important for the electorate to know about. These scholars summarize that the impact of the media is in increasing the voters' knowledge.

Knowledge is power and power carries influence. How does the individual voter interpret and become consequently influenced by a political message carried by the mass media? Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones (2003, p. 154) record that the mass media can effectively reinforce existing political opinions but cannot convert any voter to another opinion. This means that the mass media influence is to strengthen the decision of a voter who has already made up his mind on whom he wants to vote for. However, the media can influence the voter who has not made up his mind on who to vote for. As Kennamer and Chafee (1982, pp. 627-650) notice, the voters who have developed more interests as well as pay greater attention to the media learn more about the candidates and begin to develop preferences for specific candidates.

Dominick (2005, pp. 487-488) says that a person's decision to vote for a particular candidate is not influenced by the mass media only, but also by some social and psychological factors. However, he points out three possible media effects on the individual voter. These effects are conversion, reinforcement and crystallization. He explains that in conversion, the voter changes from say, voting for *Candidate A* to *Candidate B* after an exposure to the media. Dominick says this is unlikely to happen. According to him, it is difficult for the media to persuade a voter whose mind is already made up to vote otherwise. In reinforcement, the media provides the voter the information and opinions that supports his decision to vote in a particular fashion. In crystallization, the media provides the voter the information or opinion that will sharpen or elaborate his vaguely held attitudes and disposition. Dominick elaborates that the voter who is undecided or neutral on who to vote for may have his ideas crystallized after some media exposure. However, that voter who has already made up his mind on who to vote for will have his decision reinforced by the media. Similarly, Blood (1991) writes that Australian elections suggest that candidates' use of the media can have a strong effect on those who make up their minds about candidates during the campaign period. Such voters are more likely to be swayed by political appeals than those who have decided whom to choose before the campaign begins. He adds that partisan voters use the media because they are interested in politics while the undecided voters refer to the media for information about the parties, candidates, and issues.

While there remains some ambivalence about the influence of the mass media on individual voter behaviour, and therefore on election results, Forrest and Mark (1999, p.

103) and Jennings (1992, pp. 419-441) agree that generally, the influence of the mass media on voting is weak when compared with the impact of partisanship, issues and candidate evaluations. However, media effect is more pronounced among particular groups of voters, especially the swingers and their votes may decide the final result. Forrest and Marks (1999, pp. 103-104) add that in addition, the effects of the mass media may differ according to the type of political stimuli (paid or unpaid), the medium through which it is conveyed (television, the press and radio) and the particular form of communication (debates, party launches and opinion polls). Lanoue (1992, pp. 166-184) states they are the principal means through which the voters hear about the parties, issues and candidates.

During campaigns, the voters who have not decided on whom to vote for may finally make up their minds. They may be swayed in one direction based on what they get from the media. Dominick adds that two key factors to winning in any election is to keep those who are loyal to the party faithful by providing them the information that reinforces their decisions as well as provide enough information to persuade the undecided to crystallize their decision to vote for your candidate.

The voter passes through some steps in deciding whom to vote for. At times, he may have to re-orient himself. Re-orientation is the psychological requirement of trying to become conversant with what is unfamiliar. McCombs and Shaw (1972, pp. 176-187) illustrate with the picture of a voter who is confronted with many political campaigns focusing on different issues. They remark that the need for this voter to re-orient is based on his level of interest in the election and his degree of uncertainty about what the important issues in the elections are. McCombs and Shaw (1972, pp. 176-187) therefore present those voters who have high levels of interest in the elections but have high degrees of uncertainty about the issues have higher needs for orientation. They expose themselves to more news about the campaigns and campaign issues. According to them, these classes of voters are more open to considerable media influence because they align their personal agendas more closely to the media agenda. In contrast, McCombs and Shaw (1972, pp. 176-187) write that the voters with low needs for orientation and are less exposed to the news of the political campaigns consequently show less agreement with the agenda presented by the news media. McCombs and Shaw's (1972, pp. 176-187) observation agree with what Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones (2003) have earlier noted. While Cohen (1963, p. 120) writes that there is considerable evidence to suggest that voters learn much more from the immense quantity of information available to them during each campaign. Abramsom, Aldrich and Rohde (2002) share the opinion that the individual voter's perception of the partisanship of the candidate contesting and his position on issues are crucial determinants of who he eventually votes for.

The mass media influence on the individual voter are summarized by Lang and Lang (1966, p. 468) reflections that the media first force the individual's attention to certain issues by constantly presenting objects and then suggesting what the individual should think about, know about, and have feelings about. They say also that the media also build up the public images of the political figures.

Just, Grigler and Alger (1996, p. 233) examine the relationship between the citizens, politicians and the media. They say that irrespective of the various blandishments, biases and economics of truth promoted by the politicians and the media, the individual voters have demonstrated enough knowledge to reject or to re-interpret mediated messages! All the same, they point out that the individual voter's access to and interest in different sources of information about the political processes are important in his making the final decision on who to vote for. This means that voters who are information and knowledge rich have more resources from which to draw when making voting decisions. These scholars emphasize that citizens are more likely to assess political candidates based on their personal attributes rather than on their political affiliations.

Coleman and Ross (2002) call attention to open-minded citizens who they stress are capable of considering and evaluating new information and consequently changing their minds. According to them, this ability to change is what is precisely needed for the proper functioning of democratic societies. They highlight that voters who ignore new data that might challenge pre-conceived notions simply promote rigid thinking and inaction. They therefore argue that the increasing use of the media by the politicians means that the members of the public are more likely to meet these politicians as part of a broadcast radio debate.

Schiller (1973) and Freire (1971) agree that the mass media can influence the political terrain. However, they state that this impact is to manipulate. Schiller is of the opinion that the media manage the minds of its audience simply to gain their consent to the existing static power relationships through the dissemination of key ideological myths. Schiller says that the mass media become mind managers in two ways: by deliberately producing and spreading manipulative messages that do not correspond to the actual realities of social existence and by intentionally creating a false sense of reality. Freire (1971, p. 144) describes the manipulation of the human mind as "an instrument of conquest" by which "the dominant elites try to conform the masses to their objectives" by using myths which explain, justify and sometimes glamorize the prevailing conditions of existence. Freire believes that manipulators can secure popular support for a social order that is not in the interest of the wider inequity or hinder alternative social arrangements.

Are political information transmitted only through the mass media to influence the individual voter? Beck (1991, pp. 371-394) answers no. He elaborates that the mass media transmit information, and so do the social interaction networks of the individuals. Beck shows that social interactions lead to political discussions, especially of election campaigns. But these discussions are birthed from the massive mass media coverage and mobilization by the political elites. Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995), and MacKuen and Brown (1987, pp. 471-490) describe that during such discussions, the individuals that are involved exchange information and interpretations of media coverage. These scholars assign three functions to these interpersonal discussions: providing an avenue for political learning; significantly shaping individual opinions, political attitudes and voting behaviour; and influencing the individual's evaluation of the candidates and their parties.

Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) and MacKuen and Brown observations assume greater proportions when placed alongside Yankelovich's (1999, p. 25) commentary that the public mainly forms its judgments from its dialogues and discussions with other people. Members of the public weigh what they hear from others against their own convictions; compare notes with one another; and assess the views of others in terms of what makes sense to them.

Few people directly participate in presidential election campaigns. Fewer people get to see the presidential candidates. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972, pp. 176-187), it is the information flowing in the interpersonal communication channels that individual voters use. They explain that this information is generated primarily from mass media reports. The media are the major information sources. The exposures of different citizens to political information lead to their different levels of political sophistication. Dennis, Chaffee and Choe (1979, pp. 314-330) take the view that their political sophistication correlate with their political communication and voting behavior. They also observe that those who are politically active and cognitively sophisticated tend to actively seek out more campaign information and learn more about the positions of the candidates on different issues. These political sophisticates, say Neuman (1986), Delli, Michael and Keeter (1996) are more likely to vote based on their positions on policy issues and party identification because they understand issue debates and partisan cues from the campaign events.

Expectedly, different people will pay varying levels of attention to the political information from the mass media. Normally, the better educated and most politically interested actively seek information. Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954, p. 244) assert that those with the greatest media exposure are most likely to know where the different candidates stand on different issues. Trenaman and McQuail (1961, pp. 147,191) agree with them. They observe that during the 1959 British General Elections the voters who were more politically conscious also sought out more information about the candidates and their positions on different issues.

Thus, it has been established that the media may influence the individual voter. But, the type of voter that is most vulnerable to media influence is the person who depends on the media to become more knowledgeable and reduce his uncertainties. The voter who has already made up his mind on who to vote for is less susceptible to media influence. Rather, the media crystallizes or reinforces the decision that he has already taken. This is consistent with Forrest and Marks (1999, pp. 99-114) comment on the media influence on voters in the Australian 1990 federal election campaigns where campaign news, advertising and related activities reported in the mass media have modest but significant impact on how most of the people voted. But even this influence was against a background of partisan influence. However, the identification of the subgroups of voters - committed, wavering and swinging (changing), stable, volatile - shows that media influence reinforce or persuade the voters. This is similar to Aitkin's (1980, pp. 287) conviction that the mass media's roles during election include strengthening voters' weak predispositions, guiding their decision-making, providing them with entertainment and simply informing these voters of significant events. According to him, this makes it

possible for the mass media to have substantial and decisive influence on electoral results. Similarly, Sears and Weber (1988) stumble on the fact that television appears to influence political attitudes. After studying 10-17 year olds and their parents before and after the 1988 elections, they infer that the parents attitudes apparently is the greatest influence on the political socialization of their children while television appeared to be the greatest influence on these parents.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The media agenda-setting theory of McCombs and Shaw (1972, p. 177) came out of their classical publication on the influence of the mass media on the audience. They wrote that what the media consider as important are also considered important by the readers. The issues that the people get to know about tend to be those which the mass media have presented to them. Correspondingly, the value people ascribe to any issue is proportionate to the amount of attention given to the same issue in the media.

As Cohen (1963, p. 13) notes:

the media may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this that the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors and publishers of the papers that they read.

Events considered by the media to be important are given coverage. Even though the mass media may not always determine what we think about or what opinions we should hold, however, they set the agenda for our discussions by telling us what to think about or hold opinions on. Media researchers have proved that the agenda of issues and of candidates' characteristics as emphasized by the media, most likely, end up as the voters' agenda as well.

Dominick (2005, p. 475) comments that this theory literally gives the media audience a list of things that they must consider or act upon. He explains that the media make their audience to do this in two ways: by *framing* their messages and by *agenda building*. Frames are the codes that human beings use to process information. By *framing*, the media influences the people how to think about an issue through the slant, perspective or the interpretive framework that they give stories. Goffman (1974), Gamson (1992), Pan and Kooicki (1993, pp. 55-76), Snow and Benford (1988, pp. 197-217) and Kahneman and Tversky (1984, pp. 341- 350) put it, frames define problems, diagnose, evaluate and prescribe remedies. Endelman (1993, pp. 231- 242) claims that influence is exerted by transferring values from one communication location such as a speech or a news report to another context.

As Chabram (1997, pp. 3-14) and Takeshita (1997, pp. 15-27) have observed, framing is central in second-level agenda setting. By agenda building, the media play up

news worthy issues so as to arouse public attention, interest and action. Cobb and Elder (1971, pp. 892-915) add that the first process of forming a media agenda, is agenda building while the second process of forming a public agenda, is termed agenda setting. Sheaffer and Weimann (2005, p. 349) say that empirical agenda-building studies usually concentrate on two major independent variables affecting media agenda: real-world conditions and events, and the activities of political actors. They explain that the first correlates changes in real-world indicators and events and the hierarchy of issues on the media agenda. For example, as the environment sends signals of worsening conditions in a specific area, it is expected that the media would accord greater attention to this area. The second correlates the agendas or strategies of certain political actors like parties or candidates, and the media agenda.

Tankard, Handerson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem (1991) explain that a media frame is "the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration". Miller (2005, p. 275) adds that framing is the process through which the media emphasize or downplay some aspects of actualities through the size and placement of a news item, the narration used, tone of presentation, and the inclusion of particular details in the media coverage. Framing essentially involves selecting and highlighting some aspects of perceived realities to make them more noticeable, meaningful or memorable to the audience for causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment or to follow through specific recommendation.

Entman (1993, p. 52) writes that to frame:

is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and or treatment recommendation for the item described.

According to Edelman (1993, p. 232):

The character, causes and consequences of any phenomenon become radically different as changes are made in what is prominently displayed, what is repressed and especially in how observations are classified....The social world is... a kaleidoscope of potential realities, any of which can be readily evoked by altering the ways in which observations are framed and categorized.

This means that the receivers' responses and attitudes can be clearly affected when they process the given information particularly when they have little information on alternatives. The effect of framing is to prime values differently and launch salience. Put differently, the audience members are made to have different reactions. Framing is a core factor in political communication as it can shape public opinion. According to Pan and Kosicki (2001, p. 39) "a frame is an idea through which political debate unfolds, and political alignment and actions take place". This is so because frames are habitually

associated with particular policy options. By invoking a particular frame in political advertising, political strategists link claims to specific policy options. This is possible based on Altheide's (1996, p. 31) explanation that frames suggest a taken-for-granted perspective on how one might approach a problem! In political advertising, frames are routinely used to organize verbal and visual cues. As Parmelee, Perkins and Sayre (2006) remark, framing exists all through political advertising: with the candidate, the authors of political advertisements, the texts, graphics and visuals of advertising and even the receivers of the advertisements.

Framing is effective because of priming. Priming is the mechanism through which the media might influence an individual's assessment or evaluation of what is important. It is the point of view that directs public's opinions about public figures and issues and how they should be assessed. Fiske and Taylor (1991) define priming as "the effects of a particular prior context on the retrieval and interpretation of information." The psychological basis of priming lies in the selective attention the public gives to issues because it is not possible for it to pay attention to everything. In making a decision, people simply use intuitive shortcuts instead of engaging in a comprehensive analysis of their total store of information. Downs (1957, p. 207) states that traditional economic theory assumes that indefinite free information are available to the decision makers. In reality, the information is neither free nor easily available. Any person seeking information must pay a price. Since most voters are not keen to make this payment because it appears unreasonable to them to invest the time and effort necessary to be well informed on most political issues, Downs (1957) sees them relying on informational shortcuts as disseminated by trusted experts, local opinion leaders and persons with greater knowledge who share their political goals. These more informed group in the electorate belong to what Converse (2000, p. 334) describes as the small fraction of the electorate that claim the lion share of the total accessible political information.

Riker and Ordeshook (1968, pp. 25-43) declare that everyone has and uses decision-making shortcuts to compensate for the lack of knowledge and also to manage the overwhelming flow of information. The quickest cut that citizens use when making decisions is party affiliation (Lau and Redlawsk, 2001, pp. 951-971). Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960, pp. 121-128) present that voters tend to develop some psychological attachment to one of the major parties, so as to provide themselves a mirror through which to evaluate political events and actors.

Two reasons exist for extending priming effects to electoral voting behaviour. Iyengar and Kinder (1987, pp. 102-103) and Brosius and Kepplinger (1992, pp. 893-901) see these as the high positive correlation between evaluations of presidents' performances; and voting for or against them! Johnston, Blais, Brady and Crete (1992, pp. 878-892) actually find evidence of the influence of media salience and priming on the voting intentions of individuals.

Media consumers evaluate messages based on what they previously know. Iyengar and Kinder (1987, p. 63) conducted extensive series of agenda-setting

experiments to produce significant evidence of the priming effects of television news on people's opinions about the US president's accomplishment on defense, inflation, arms control, civil rights and unemployment issues. They discover that the persons more exposed to heavy news coverage on these issues are more influenced than persons not exposed to the news coverage. Brosius and Kepplinger (1992, pp. 893-901) find priming effect also occurs with political partisanship. The German voters' preference for the Christian Democrats in 1986 was substantially influenced by television news coverage of energy supply and the East German situation. The other remaining voters' preference for the Social Democratic Party was influenced by television coverage of the East-West relations, environmental protection and pensions. Shaw (1999, pp. 183-202) makes a day-to-day observation of the last three months in the 1992 and 1996 US presidential elections to establish second level agenda setting. He notes that the tone of television news coverage about key campaign events influenced voters' preference of the candidates in the two elections. The favourable coverage of the Republican Party's campaign events on four national television networks increased support for the Republican candidate. Conversely, favourable coverage of the Democrat Party's campaign events decreased support for the Republican candidate.

THE MEDIA AGENDA INFLUENCE ON PEOPLE

The agenda-setting influence of the news media is not limited to focusing public attention on particular topics but extends to influencing understanding and perspectives on the topics in the news. Media agendas are *objects* or topics of public issues. In turn, these objects or topics have numerous *attributes*, characteristics or traits that describe them. This means that each object also has an agenda of attributes. The agenda of attributes presented for issues, public figures, or other objects literally influences the pictures of these that we hold in our minds. When the media report and the public talk about an object, some attributes are emphasized by drawing attention to them. Others may be ignored by receiving little or no attention at all. Borrowing Lippmann's (1922, p. 29) phrase, the media can influence *the pictures in our heads* about issues or other objects by what pictures they paint for us through emphasizing attributes of the news objects.

McCombs (n.d, p. 8) writes that the features of an issue covered in the news – and the relative emphasis on various aspects of it do make considerable difference in how people view that issue. The prominence given to news coverage tells how important it is. The details of the coverage given by the agenda form the attributes. It is from these attributes that the public forms its images and perspective about issues and public figures. McCombs points out that influencing the focus of public attention is a powerful role, but, arguably, influencing the agenda of attributes for an issue or political figure is the epitome of political power. Therefore, determining the way an issue is framed significantly influences the ultimate outcome of the message.

METHOD OF STUDY

The survey research design was used for this study as large human samples were used. The objective was determine why they voted in or voted out the political parties in the

ways that they did during the election time. The survey design allowed the researcher to collect and analyze data from some of the voters in Ado-Odo/Ota that were considered representative of the entire population. From these, the researcher can draw a conclusion concerning the whole population. The survey design made it possible to study the samples and variables as they were without any attempt from the researcher at controlling them. This research method proved useful in determining the relationship between the variables in this study.

THE STUDY POPULATION

The population for this study were the registered voters in the 2007 Nigerian General Elections, resident in Ado-Odo/Ota. Ado-Odo/Ota is one of the Local Governments Areas in Ogun State. This council exhibits the qualities of both an urbanized and a rural community. It is metropolitan Lagos neighbour. This community houses the major tribes in Nigeria. The voters here received television broadcasts from twelve television stations: Gateway Television, Abeokuta; Africa Independent Television (AIT), Alagbado; Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Tejuosho and Victoria Island; Galaxy, Channels, Silverbird, Muri Television (MITV), Degue Broadcasting Network (DBN) and Lagos State Television/Lagos Weekend Television.

There were 187,391 registered voters spread into the sixteen wards. Six of these wards — Ota 1, Sango, Iju, Ado-Odo II, Ketu/Adie-Owe and Agbara II were randomly selected. Five percent of the registered voters in each ward were randomly sampled. It was assumed that these voters would provide a large enough sample for meaningful analysis. Thus 3,635 voters were selected. The primary instrument for data collection was a questionnaire.

RESULTS

Below are the data generated from the responses by the different respondents regarding television broadcast influence on their choice of political parties.

TABLE 1: WHETHER TELEVISION INFLUENCED THE PARTY VOTED FOR

RESPONSE	PERCENT
YES	38.2
NO	59.6
DON'T KNOW	2.2
TOTAL	=
100.0	
n	=
3,064	

The respondents were asked if they would say that what they watched or saw on television influenced the party that they actually voted for in the last presidential election. Some were actually influenced but most were not. This is in agreement with Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954, p. 248) finding on the American 1948 election study, where they found that voters' exposure to the media did not make them to change their political preferences. Rather, their exposure reinforced their earlier decisions. Thus, political contestants and their parties may use television to attempt to influence politically naive and the undecided voters who may decide on who to vote for during campaign peaks. Nevertheless, they may be better off using a mixture of communication channels to reach both the decided and undecided voters. Their communication efforts and media budget should not be intensified on television programmes, spots and editorials alone.

TABLE 2: WHETHER ELECTORAL PROGRAMMES ON TELEVISION INFLUENCING RESPONDENTS CHANGE OF MIND ON PARTY

RESPONSE	PERCENT
YES	29.7
NO	68.1
DON'T KNOW	2.2
TOTAL	= 100.0
n	= 3,064

Table 2 proves that 29.70% of the respondents changed their minds about the party that they initially wanted to vote for in the election after watching electoral programmes on television. But 68.1% of the voters did not change their minds. This means that most of the respondents did not change their minds about the party that they initially determined to vote for, despite watching electoral programmes on television.

The practical implication is that political parties may not be wise spending most of their media budget on television advertising in attempts to make citizens vote their parties into power. This is because most of the respondents did not allow television broadcasts to swing them away from their initial choices of the parties.

TABLE 3: TELEVISION BROADCASTS CAUSED RESPONDENTS TO VOTE FOR A PARTICULAR PARTY

RESPONSE	PERCENT
STRONGLY AGREE	18.6
AGREE	26.3
STRONGLY DISAGREE	24.1
DISAGREE	26.0
DON'T KNOW	5.0
TOTAL = 100.0 n = 3,064	

Some of the respondents (44.9%) were affirmative that what they saw on television made them to vote for particular political parties. It is interesting to notice that 50.2% other respondents did not agree that television had such impact on them.

From the fore-going, it can be seen that television wielded some influence in making the respondents vote for particular parties. But these were moderated by partisanship and interpersonal relationships which played more powerful roles and thus

greatly influenced the actions of some of the respondents. Party members would have identified with their parties. What television probably did was to reinforce the party faithfuls close-minded opinions and probably managed to persuade some of the undecided voters without any or weak sympathies for any party.

TABLE 4: TELEVISION INFLUENCED RESPONDENTS' CHOICE OF PARTY

RESPONSE	PERCENT
STRONGLY AGREE	18.8
AGREE	24.5
STRONGLY DISAGREE	20.5
DISAGREE	27.5
DON'T KNOW	8.7
TOTAL	
= 100.0	
n	
= 3,064	

The respondents were asked if television influenced their choices in the political parties that they voted for. Table 4 confirms that 43.3% of the respondents agreed that television influenced them into choosing the specific party to vote for. However, 48.0% of the respondents thought otherwise. A closer look would show that the difference between these two groups is not very wide. This means that television can both reinforce the decision of the partisans as well as convert the undecided voters. Possibly, party members and other respondents with interests in the election did not allow television to dictate the parties they voted for. It is to be concluded that they allowed their partisanship to dictate the parties that they voted for. The non-partisans may have been more influenced by the pictures, debates, showmanship of the parties' spokespersons or any other thing.

CROSS TABULATIONS

Different variables like the voter's location, ward were cross tabulated to detect if there were relationships between them arising from their exposure to television broadcasts.

TABLE 5: AN ACROSS WARD COMPARISON OF THE INFLUENCE OF TELEVISION EXPOSURE AND RESPONDENTS CHANGING THEIR MINDS ON PARTY VOTED

RESPONSES	OTA I (%)	SANG O (%)	IJU (%)	ADO ODO II (%)	KETU ADIE-OWE (%)	AGBARA II (%)
YES	27.8	35.7	25.3	28.1	29.4	36.7
NO	67.7	61.8	72.6	71.2	69.0	63.3
DON'T KNOW	4.5	2.5	2.1	.7	1.6	
TOTAL	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

n = 396 838 1110 306 245 169
 $\chi^2 = 47.635, df = 10, p = .000$

In Table 5, voters from the six wards were similarly asked if what television showed made them to change their minds on the parties that they voted for. Some of them agreed that they changed their minds from the parties that they initially wanted to vote for after watching electoral programmes on television. Most of those who changed their minds came from Agbara II and Sango wards. These are citizens who live in the townships and have greater access to television broadcasts as well as opportunities of interacting with other people who may not necessarily come from their ethnic regions nor were affiliated by other cultural ties.

Majority of the respondents from the remaining wards refused changing their minds from voting for the political parties that they initially made up their minds to vote for. Examining these figures closer indicate that most of these respondents, especially those from Iju, Ado-Odo II and Ketu/Adie-Owe wards were not sufficiently influenced by television broadcasts to change their minds on the parties that they voted for. This means that irrespective of whatever electoral programme television showed, these

respondents still voted for the political parties that they had already made up their minds to so vote for.

However, the Pearson chi-square test values maintain that there is a significant relationship between the exposure of these respondents to television broadcasts and their consequent shifting to the parties that they voted for. Thus, television broadcasts influenced respondents from the different wards to change their minds to the political parties that they voted for.

TABLE 6: AN ACROSS WARD COMPARISON OF TELEVISION EXPOSURE DETERMINING

PARTIES VOTED FOR IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION	RESPONSES	OTA 1 (%)	SANGO (%)	IJU (%)	ADO ODO II (%)	ETU/ADIE-OWA (%)	AGBAR II (%)
	YES		38.4	45.6	34.4	39.2	28.2
NO		58.1	51.8	63.3	60.1	70.6	60.4
DON'T KNOW		3.5	2.6	2.3	.7	1.2	
TOTAL		100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0%	100.0 %

n = 396 838 1110 306 245

$X^2 = 51.320, df = 10, p = 0.000$

Respondents were asked if what they watched on television determined the political parties that they voted for. It is obvious from Table 6 that most of the respondents did not agree that what they watched on television determined the party that they voted for in the presidential election. Only a minor proportion of the respondents from the six wards allowed what they watched on television to determine the party that they voted for. These were mostly respondents from Sango, Agbara, Ado-Odo II and Ota 1 wards. These respondents are urban based. But the majority of the respondents did not, especially those from the rural areas of Ketu/Adie-Owe and Iju wards. These rural wards still depend on their local community and opinion leaders for political guidance. Thus, television is effective in causing mind changes among voters in the urban areas. Its use should be emphasised in such areas.

A significant relationship exists between these respondents watching television and these broadcasts determining the political parties that they voted for in the last

presidential election. It can be seen that television broadcasts helped these respondents in their different wards to determine the political parties that they voted for the presidential election.

TABLE 7: A COMPARISON OF RESPONDENTS' WARD DESCRIPTION AND THEIR CHANGING THEIR MINDS ON PARTY VOTED FOR IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

RESPONSES	RURAL (%)	URBAN (%)	SUBURBAN (%)
YES	29.9	31.1	24.4
NO	69.2	66.2	73.3
DON'T KNOW	.9	2.7	2.3
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
n =	698	1842	524
$\chi^2 =$	17.198, df = 4, p = 0.002		

Similarly, it was sought to find out if respondents changed their minds from the initial political parties that they had earlier made up their minds to vote for before exposures to television broadcasts. As can be seen in Table 7, most of the respondents did not change their minds. In other words, their watching television programmes on the elections did not sway them away from their earlier decisions. Overall, 68.1% of the respondents did not change their minds from those political parties that they had earlier made up their minds to vote for from the onset.

This is consistent with what Blood observed in his study of the Australian election of 1987 where he found that voters who were strongly partisan and interested in politics not only made early choices, but also attached importance to these choices. The Ado-Odo/Ota voters followed the same trend in the 2007 Nigerian presidential election.

From the Pearson chi-square test, we see a significant relationship between the description of the wards of the respondents and the respondents changing their minds on the parties that they voted for in the presidential election because of watching telecasts. In other words, television broadcasts made respondents in the various wards to change their minds on the parties that they voted for during the last Nigerian presidential election.

TABLE 8: A COMPARISON OF RESPONDENTS' WARD DESCRIPTION AND TELEVISION DETERMINING PARTY VOTED FOR IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

RESPONSES	RURAL	URBAN	SUBURBAN
	(%)	(%)	(%)
YES	33.4	42.0	31.7
NO	65.8	55.5	65.8
DON'T KNOW	.8	2.5	2.5
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
n	= 698	1842	524
χ^2	= 37.033, df = 4,	p = 0.000	

Some of the respondents who asserted that what they watched on television determined the party that they actually voted for. Some others did not agree that what television showed on air determined the party that they actually voted for. An equal percentage of 65.8 % respondents came from the rural and suburban areas. Those from the urban areas were 55.5% .

It can be seen that the voters from the rural areas have been consistent on the minimal effects of television on their voting behaviour. They did not allow television broadcasts to influence them. But a reasonable number of the urban dwellers did otherwise. Politicians and their media managers should therefore adopt a cocktail media mix to penetrate the rural and suburban areas. Expectedly, they should continue using television commercials, spots and advertorials in the urban cities.

The Pearson chi-square values indicate a significant relationship between television broadcasts and these broadcasts consequentially shaping the political parties the respondents voted for during the election. What the different respondents watched on television - irrespective of their different wards - helped them in determining the political parties that they voted for during this presidential election.

TABLE 9: A COMPARISON OF RESPONDENTS' PARTY MEMBERSHIP AND TELEVISION CHANGING THEIR MINDS ON PARTY VOTED FOR IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

RESPONSES	PARTY	NON-	n
	MEMBERSHIP	PARTY	
	HIP	MEMBERSHIP	
	(%)	(%)	
YES	34.9	25.7	
NO	63.1	72.0	
DON'T KNOW	2.0	2.3	
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%	=
1337	1727		
	$\chi^2 =$	30.200, df = 2, p = 0.000	

It is surprising that some party members said that they changed their minds on the parties that they voted for after watching television broadcasts. However, the greater number of party members (63.1%) did not change their minds. Most of the non-party members did not change their minds either too. For those that changed their minds, television may have shown that the parties were not "good enough" because their manifestos did not promise what the respondents want to see fulfilled in the country.

It can be concluded that television broadcasts may not have been impactful enough to cause mind changes in the respondents about the parties that they had initially decided to vote. The number of respondents that agreed that what they saw on television on the presidential election that made them to change their minds on the parties that they voted for were in the minority. Thus, producers of political contents might stand to garner more votes for their employers if they make their messages more focused and persuasive at making the voters take the requisite action of voting in the parties that they are working for. They may also add other media channels to the media mix so as to reach a wider section of the populace.

The Pearson chi-square test result shows a significant relationship between respondents' party membership and television broadcasts changing these respondents' minds on the parties that they voted for in the presidential election. It is obvious that television broadcasts influenced respondents who are party members to change their minds on the parties that they voted for during the presidential election.

TABLE 10: A COMPARISON OF RESPONDENTS' PARTY MEMBERSHIP AND TELEVISION DETERMINING PARTY VOTED FOR IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

RESPONSES	PARTY	NON-
	MEMBERS	PARTY
	HIP	MEMBERS
	(%)	HIP
	(%)	(%)
YES	44.4	33.5
NO	53.7	64.2
DON'T KNOW	1.9	2.3
TOTAL	100.0%	100.0%

$$n = 1337 \quad 1727$$

$$\chi^2 = 38.375; df = 2; p = 0.000$$

The respondents who were registered party members said that television broadcasts determined the parties that they voted for. But most of the other registered party members totalling 53.7% did not agree that what they saw or watched on television actually influenced their decisions on the parties that they voted for. It is clear that their deep party identification and support for their preferred parties was not shaken by whatever television aired. Therefore, television should be used to reinforce and strengthen their partisan sentiments.

For the respondents who were not registered party members, the minority agreed that what they watched on television determined the parties that they voted for. This means that television did not influence the decisions of most of the non-registered members too. For the voters who were not affected by television, it might be a good thing to use television more creatively to catch and retain their attention.

The Pearson chi-square values between respondents' party membership and television determining the party that they voted for in the last presidential election displays a significant relationship between the two factors. It can therefore be concluded that television broadcasts influenced party members in the political parties that they voted for during the presidential election.

FINDINGS

CVA The frequency tables show that television broadcasts did influence voters' behavior in their choice of political parties they choosed to vote for. However, the number of respondents that were so influenced were in the minority. When the figures were subjected to the Pearson chi-square tests, there was found significant relationships between the variables cross-tabulated and television broadcasts influencing the parties that they voted for. These tests further prove that television broadcasts influenced voters' choice of parties in the presidential election.

The Pearson Moment Correlation tests also show significant and positive relationships among all the variables testing to see if the respondents' exposure to television influenced their choices of the political parties that they voted for. There is a correlation of 0.299 between what respondents watched on television actually determining the parties that they voted for and what they watched on television making them to vote for particular parties. Likewise, there is a correlation of 0.266 between what the respondents watched on television actually determining the parties voted for and its influence on the parties that they choosed to vote for. However, there is a 0.159 correlation between what respondents watched on television actually determining the party they voted for in the last election and the same television determining the party that they voted for in the last presidential election.

There is also 0.403 correlation between what respondents watched on television on the elections making them to vote for particular parties and what they saw on television influencing their choices of the parties that they voted for. There is also a positive relationship of 0.338 for television determining the parties that they voted for. There is a positive correlation of 0.415 between what respondents watched on television determining the party that they voted for and what they saw on television influencing their choices of the parties that they voted for.

DISCUSSION

From the fore going, it can be drawn that four out of the six correlation values are low. Only two are relatively higher. Even though the correlations of 0.299; 0.266 and 0.159 are all positive but they are not significantly different from 0. Their values are low. Even though it is accepted from these tests that television broadcasts were the major influence on the voters' choice of parties voted for in the presidential election is accepted, but the depth of this influence is low. Other sources of influence on the respondents' decision included his party membership, the opinion leaders, family members, his friends and the peer groups that he belonged to. This means that political parties may have to look for other avenues they might devise to wield more influence on the electorate to win their votes.

Electoral programmes on television had more influence on the voters living in the urban areas than those from the rural areas. The voters from the rural areas were more

attentive to their family members and community leaders. In these areas, family ties still hold tight and face-to-face communication is still treasured.

In Nigeria, contestants run for elections on the platforms of specific political parties. There is no record of any candidate running for any presidential election as an independent. Thus, any voter that has made up his mind to vote for a specific candidate has invariably made up his mind to vote for that candidate's party. These explain why these respondents did not change their minds on either the candidate or the party that they wanted to vote for in spite of their exposure to positive or negative television broadcasts. Apparently, what they saw on television did not determine the party that they voted for.

This finding is consistent with Campbell, Gurin and Miller's (1954) national survey in the United States of America where they noticed that the mass media are not as important influencers of voting behaviour as the voters' partisanship. They discovered that the election period is not the time for voters to change their minds from their original intentions, but is rather the period for them to identify with their parties. Since some of these voters have feelings of personal attachment towards these political parties because of their own decisions, family socialization or group influences, their minds are already closed to only voting for the parties that they have identified with, even before the election campaigns start. This therefore disabled them from changing their decisions irrespective of whatever television broadcasts.

Similarly, Trenaman and McQuail (1961, p. 168) who studied the 1959 British General Elections could not find sufficient evidence to support the notion that television or any other mass media did any other thing for the British voters other than providing them with information. This means that television did not influence the voters to change their party preferences. However, another study by Blumler and McQuail (1969, p. 200) on the 1964 British General Elections reversed these findings. They found that the voters with weak or moderate interest in following electoral campaigns but who were heavily exposed to Liberal Party television broadcasts developed more favourable attitudes towards this party. All the same, the voters who keenly followed the campaigns were much more stable in their political attitudes as television broadcasts did not change these attitudes. In other words, television may have influenced voters who are weak in party identification to change their decisions about the parties that they voted for, but had insignificant or no influence on strong party faithfuls.

The respondents who identified with political parties may not be motivated by any other reason than their desire to support their parties in otherwise unattractive political activities (Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978). Thus party faithfuls blindly supported their parties and may have selectively exposed themselves to pro-party broadcasts that reinforced their decisions to vote in their parties into power.

CONCLUSION

Most of the voters – urban, suburban and rural based - had already made up their minds on the political parties that they wanted to vote for during this election. Most of these voters did not sway from their earlier decisions, despite exposures to television broadcasts. Although the statistical tests proved that television influenced the parties that

voters in Ado-Odo/Ota gave their votes, the correlation values were very low, showing that television influence was not too impactful. This study proves that sending electoral and political messages through television is an effective means of reaching the electorate, especially those of them that had not fully made up their minds on who to vote for before the start of the electoral campaigns. The votes of these undecided voters can decide electoral results. Television broadcasts appear more effective in the urban areas than in the rural areas. Thus, political communication strategists are advised to add other means of mass and personal communication to reach a broader spectrum of the voters, especially those in the rural areas. They should not deploy their entire media budget to television campaigning. They must add other news media like the radio, newspapers and magazines. They should also use local opinion leaders and emphasize personal communication in the rural areas.

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