
Stella Amara Aririguzoh*

Abstract
This study sought to find out if television broadcasts increased the political knowledge of residents in Ado-Odo/Ota areas of Ogun State, Nigeria during the 2007 Nigerian presidential election. Questionnaires were administered on a sample of 3635 respondents. The Pearson Moment Bivariate Two-Tailed Correlation tests were used to measure the linear associations between respondents' exposure to television broadcasts and their increases in political knowledge. Positive and statistically relevant correlations were found between respondents' exposure to television broadcasts and their increases in the knowledge of the last Nigerian presidential election. The information television gave out made the voters in Ado Odo/Ota to know more about the last presidential election, of the presidential candidates and their political parties. Television broadcasts also made them to be familiar with the identifying logos/marks of the political parties. In addition, voters' exposure to television broadcasts made them to know where to place their thumbprints when voting. Because of the deluge of information provided by television, the voters were further stimulated to find out more about the political parties and about the presidential election contestants. This means that television was influential in educating voters.

Key Words: Television, Elections, Voters Knowledge, Politics.

Introduction
Television is one of the mass media channels that can be used to reach the voting public because of its capacity to inform, educate and entertain its audiences. Television informs through its broadcast of news and commentaries. It is, therefore, used accordingly to stimulate the political interests of the electorate by the information it gives. Bittner (1989, p. 258) writes that television's overwhelming popularity can be attributed to its two dimensions of sight and sound. He adds that many people spend more time watching television than they spend on other media channels. Ross and Nightingale (2003, p. 104) also observe that television can attract and even hold public attention by what it chooses to or not to present to viewers. This means that television can be employed to influence the decisions of those that vote: either to vote for or against an individual and his political party.

Compared to other forms of mass media, television is relatively more important. Antonoff (2007, para 1)) remarks that:

*Stella Amara Aririguzoh is a Lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria

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Television is the most widespread form of communication in the world. Though most people will never meet the leader of a country, travel to the moon, or participate in a war, they can observe these experiences through the images on their television. Television has a variety of applications in society, business, and science. The most common use of television is as a source of information and entertainment for viewers in their homes.

Elections are an important feature of democratic systems and the avenues through which those seeking public offices can be voted in. Candidates with the ambition of occupying such offices generally attempt to use the mass media to maximize their chances of winning at the polls. Nigerian politicians have attempted to make political communication more effective by using television in the hope of influencing electoral outcomes. Television has covered different political processes including major political events and institutions, campaigns and elections. It has consistently provided a direct and sensitive link between the politicians and the electorate. The effective use of television may affect poll results.

The most commonly accepted impact of television is its ability to give information. Baran (2004, p. 450) writes that television is the primary source of public affairs information. Such information may attract voters or discourage them from the polls. In a democratic nation, voters watch television to source for news and information on the government and elections.

It is presumed that the greater the number of voters who go to the polls, the more certain it is that these voters have decided who occupy the public offices. Therefore, the essential demand placed on television during election time is that it provides the public with information. Television is essential for enhanced voting behaviour in advanced democracies where television sets are basic household items. In Nigeria where poverty reigns, the income per capita is extremely low and citizens experience incessant power failures, that at times run into days, has the watching of television programmes affected electoral results.

Television came to Nigeria on October 1, 1959, some twenty years after its appearance in Europe. Since then Nigeria has held six presidential elections. The last of these elections was held in April 2007. Television has been vigorously employed in electioneering campaigns to stir up the electorate or to influence public opinion positively or negatively. Television has brought into millions of homes presidential aspirants’ debates. In the 1993 presidential election, the two aspirants held a televised debate. The debate was between M.K.O. Abiola, the flag bearer of the Social Democratic Party (S.D.P) and his National Republican Convention (N.R.C.) opponent, Alhaji Bashir Tofa. During the 1999 elections, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) approved thirty political parties to contest the elections. Most of the parties fielded presidential candidates. The major television stations arranged debate schedules for the contestants. The candidates discussed national issues and the solutions they would offer.

Statement of the Problem
Television is a channel for providing the electorate with information on the parties, their candidates and any other matter that will encourage voters’ participation in the electoral process. Minow and Mitchell (1986, pp. 146-157) point out that presidential elections cannot be predicted. However, they share the view that candidates can be put on television to advertise themselves through slickly produced spots and programme length presentations. According to them, presidential electioneering on television informs the electorate through “candidates’ commercials, candidates-engineered news clips, special interest broadcasts and quibbling over televised debates conditions”. These commercials
may be likened to mini-movies where great care is taken to make each detail of production - like lighting, editing, music, camera angle - pass across a specific message or convey specific mood. According to O'Cass (2001, pp. 136-152), Hayes and McAllister (1996, pp. 135-146), most political parties and their candidates have grown to increasingly rely on television advertising to inform and influence voters during elections.

The works of Faber, Tims and Schmitt (1993, p. 67-76), Hill (1989, p. 14-22), Weaver, Tinkham and Tinkham (1999, pp. 13-30) have led to a better understanding of the role of communication by political parties and the behaviour of voters in response to these pieces of political communication. Understanding voter decision making and the factors that influence their decisions, including what is broadcast on television, are important for practical and theoretical reasons. There are two reasons. Hayes and McAllister (1996, pp. 135-146) identify the first as the considerable economic and social costs associated with electoral choice. Millions of naira are budgeted for television. O'Cass (2001, pp. 136-152) sees the second reason as that of economic and social functioning of a nation being dependent on the policies that the elected politicians implement.

However, the role of television in the electioneering processes in emergent democracies like Nigeria is still under investigation. Against the background of audience low level of media literacy, are voters able to make meanings out of television broadcast contents on election as to increase their political knowledge? Therefore, the problem for investigation was to find out if television broadcasts led to increases in their knowledge of the voters in Ado Odo/Ota in the last Nigerian presidential election.

Objective of the Study
The main objective of this study is to find out if voters in Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government Area in Ogun State increased their political knowledge about the presidential election because of their watching television broadcasts. This involves:

(i) Determining whether the information television gave to the voters about the presidential election was clear and adequate;
(ii) Finding out the specific types of information the television gave out to the voters;
(iii) Finding out if the information given by television broadened the knowledge base of the voters on the presidential election;
(iv) Seeking to know if television provided the voters with sufficient information of the presidential candidates and their political parties.

Research Question
Based on the research problem, this study will attempt to answer the Research Question:
- Did the information offered by television result in an improved voters' knowledge of the presidential election?

Statement of Hypothesis
Drawing from the objective of the study, the following hypotheses formulated are tested in this study. The alternative hypotheses are stated first.

H₁: Exposure to television broadcasts increased the voters' knowledge of the presidential election, of the candidates and the political parties.

H₀: Exposure to television broadcasts did not increase the voters' knowledge of the presidential election, of the candidates and the political parties.
Literature Review

Television is a mass media channel with the potential for affecting the behaviour of those exposed to its messages. Adair (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....”

By nature, television is basically a source of entertainment and information. Burton (2000, p. 58) explains that these two functions are intertwined since television entertainment is also informational and informational programmes are packaged to be entertaining. The nature of television explains those features of television that bear on the study of television as a mass communication channel, as an industry and as a cultural agent. Television may also be seen in terms of what is packaged in a particular manner for it to air, for example television drama or the contents that it airs, for example, sports.

Skon and Schroder (1992, p. 62) see television as the most powerful form of public communication that occupies a principal position in the social negotiation of ideas, values and lifestyles. Gerber, Gross, Morgan and Signorielli (1989, pp. 17-40) remark that television mostly shares images and messages. They add that television is also the most common source of everyday information in a heterogeneous population. As Woll and Binstock (1991, p. 475) remark, “the pervasiveness of television including the fact that a vast majority of people gain most of their news and views of political candidates from it, makes it the most significant medium in shaping political views.” Morgan and Signorielli (1990, pp. 13-34) explain that television has become the world’s most common and constant learning environment that mirrors and leads the society. This confirms the assertion of Gerber and Gross (1976, pp. 172-194) that today’s television set is a key member of the household with implicit access to every person in the house! It is not a surprise when they remark that “most people watch television more religiously than they attend church services.

In the present day of television saturation, Van den Bar (1971, pp. 193-205) remarks that television itself has changed many things. He explains that television now transmits information directly to a mass audience. These messages are validated by people that are significant in the lives of the viewers or by the people that they respect. Prior to this, Lazarsfeld and his team (1944) found the opposite situation where information was transmitted to a small group of well-informed persons who then interpreted and passed on the messages to other people in a face-to-face discussion.

Public access broadcasting fulfills an important function in democracy. Moyser and Wagstaff (1987) and Fuwar (1997) say that it provides the public a platform for the sharing of views and opinions. This platform can potentially influence the decisions of the listening audience. Hellier (1978) stresses that such a forum constitutes an extra political power base where the broadcasters assist the politicians to check the pulse of the nation. Democracy is served by the range and diversity of television programmes, which allow the voters to share their views and to hold the politicians to account. Television programmes provide the platform for the exchange and consideration of views without the explicit intention to achieve consensus but with the implicit intention of encouraging dialogue between the public and the politicians, whereby the latter at least listens to the former.

However, Minow and Mitchell (1976, pp. 74-87) feel that television can best fulfill this role by televised National Debates, offering limited right of reply for the opposition party, having the government sponsor broadcast time for presidential candidates, and
television covering congressional proceedings to counter what they describe as incumbent television that gives the incumbent president ready access to television time to reach millions of potential voters regularly at little or no cost to himself or his political supporters. In contrast, the opposition party and those potential candidates who would challenge the incumbent's re-election have little similar access. Minow and Mitchell (1986, p. 146) were later to advise that the public is better served by the broadcasters presenting only the two leading candidates and ignoring every other candidate and not even providing them with the required equal time to have their say!

The mass media act primarily as the conveyor of information from the candidates, their parties and the voting public. Communication facilitates the operation and maintenance of political systems. Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1990) call attention to the press functioning as an instrument of significance because it is an essential part of the society and of the political structure. The three main actors clamouring for space on the public stage are the government, citizens and the media. Light (1991), cited in Edwards and Wood (1999, pp. 327-344) writes that the media are "... a bridge to the political environment". Lippmann (1922, p. 3) adds that the media is the mediator between "the world outside and the pictures in our heads" because they are the primary sources of those pictures in our heads about the larger world of public affairs, a world that for most citizens is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind." He argues (1922, p. 16) that this is so because "the real environment is altogether too big, too complex and too fleeting for direct acquaintance" which people are not equipped to deal with! However, Behr and Iyengar (1985, p. 40) argue that not all the world is out of reach! What people know about the world depends largely on what the media decides to tell them. Explicitly, this mediated observation of the world translates to the main concerns of the media strongly becoming the priorities of the public. Whatever is prominent on the media agenda becomes prominent in the public mind.

Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones (2003, p. 154) pertinently observe that every political action is a reaction to a form of communication. The role of the mass media in the political process is dependent on how it affects the different groups in the society as the media offers contrasting viewpoints on the same issue.

Lippmann (1922) on the other hand writes that the media informs by defining

Our world, not just the world of politics during and between elections, but almost all our world beyond our immediate personal and family matters. The issues, personalities and situations towards which we hold feelings of endorsement or rejection, those points of attention about which pollsters seek the public sphere pulse are things about which we depend on the media to inform us.

Lippmann believes that the media have the power to persuade and change the voter's attitude. Media persuasion is not the mere putting of ideas into media consumers heads, but the search to draw out emotional responses from them.

The media are present in the society to act as the mirrors that reflect the happenings in the society. According to Huggins and Turner (1997, p. 392) our modern day society is pre-eminent media based with an increasing growing use of personal computers and telemedia, thus signalling a new era of media pervasiveness. West and Turner (2004, p. 375) point out that very few institutions affect our lives more than the media. They observe that media presences not only invade our lives, but that they follow us everywhere. In democratic societies, the media are more popular channels of communication between the office holders and the citizens. Adeseye and Ibagere (1999, p. 101) say that the essence of communication in politics is for those who are vested with the opportunity of exercising political power to get information about those over which
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