

Assessment of African Independent Television's (AIT's) 2015 Presidential Election Campaign Influence on Voter's Participation in Asaba Metropolis of Delta State

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Abstract

This study assessed African Independent Television's (AIT's) 2015 presidential election campaign influence on voters' participation in Asaba Metropolis of Delta State. The thrust of the study was to understand from the stand point of empiricism whether indeed AIT's campaigns in the 2015 presidential election influenced voters participation in the election. The study was hinged on the Uses and Gratifications theory. The survey research method was used in carrying out the study. A sample size of 399 respondents was purposively selected from the population of Asaba residents. The questionnaire was used as the instrument for gathering data for the study. Data collected through the questionnaire were presented in tables and analysed using frequency and percentages while the hypothesis were tested using the chi-square statistical formula. The study found, among others, that a significant proportion of the

respondents had a good exposure to AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign, and that their exposure indeed influenced their participation in the election as attested to by the result of the presidential election in Asaba. The study recommends, among others, that television stations should avoid projecting candidates who have nothing to offer the electorate, and that AIT must always give equal opportunities to all candidates and should avoid airing hate speeches of contending candidates during electioneering campaigns.

Key words: Campaign, Election, Politics, Participation, Television, Voters.

Introduction

In this era of digital technology and globalization, the functions of the media are not limited to only informing, educating and entertaining the audience, but includes enlightening and mobilising the electorate for successful electoral process, as well as providing platforms through which individuals or members of society can make their views on public issues known, among other functions they perform in the society. Television, as a popular medium of public communication, is one of the avenues through which millions of viewers are reached with the same message at the same time, and through individual and group opinions are expressed. The perceived impact of the television on its audience is so much hence Nwabueze (2014) declares that “television leaves a lasting impression in the minds of the audience especially in this ‘seeing-is-believing’ era” (147).

Television is the most prevalent form of communication in our present society. According to Aririguzoh (2007), Television has proved to be immensely popular in enhancing political education and participation. For this reason the government, nongovernmental organizations, political parties, contestants and voters recognise that television broadcasts can be powerful tools to be employed during times of election. What television shows or refuses to show about candidates and the electoral processes can affect citizens' participation and may help to determine electoral results (p.3).

Based on the foregoing fact, it is not unexpected that politicians, their political parties and media strategists have massively deployed it to pass across one piece of information or the other to the electorate in the hope of swaying them to favour their own purpose. Television broadcasting houses, both publicly owned and privately owned, also package political information on election, such as commentaries, editorials, news stories, advertorials and media events.

Private owned television stations such as Africa Independent Television (AIT) has been known for promoting news and information related to politics and major happenings in the political scenes around the world. Hence, there is close relationship between communicating political news and other politics related news contents and citizens' dispositions, attitudes, behavioural pattern and perception of their leaders. Viewers not only listen to news, they also analyse, select, make comments, give

opinions and share comments on how they perceive media effects on politics generally. It is against this backdrop that these researchers seek to investigate the perception of viewers/audience on political news coverage on television stations using Africa Independent Television (AIT) as the main focus.

Exposure to television is part of the popular culture. Voters watch television to source for information on those vying for positions. The mass media channels, including television, are the principal sources of information on modern campaigns. This is consistent with Ehiwario's (2012) assertion that there is no gain saying the fact that the media help in shaping the perception of the voters during the process of electioneering campaigns as they try to x-ray the various political actors or players. This is so because the media have the power of persuasion. Perception is the process of attaining awareness or understanding of sensory information (p.197).

Voters must have accurate and timely information to make informed decisions. But unless they have adequate information on the various issues they face they will not be able to contribute the quota to the entire electoral/political process (Keghku, 2003, p.42). Hence Guanah (2014, p. 22) declares that election is an integral part of the democratic process, and that democracy can only be said to be in place if the process that brings any individual or government into existence is anchored on a credible, free and fair election. The electorates have to be in position to make informed decisions leading to their voting pattern. They can make constructive contributions when they have been reached through appropriate medium. Agba (2006), citing Huges *et al.* (1976), enumerated the role of the media (television) in political campaigns as follows: Reporting and interpreting events, Defining issues, Portraying personalities, Investigating support, Identifying trends, and Checking and analyzing public opinion (201).

According to them, the media do all the aforementioned and the people conclude the rest. The means and forms of reaching the people depend on the background, nature and environment of the people. The various media (electronics, print, Internet, etc) applications to inform and influence the people's choice and behaviour have to tally with the level, exposure and development of the recipient groups. For effective mobilisation, the media could identify the masses by segmentation in terms of age, sex, occupation, regionalisation, state, local government structure, income groups-low, middle and upper and even organisation.

The essence of political campaigns is to inform and appeal to the conscience of the electorate who are to elect candidates into positions of authority. When the voters are not well educated about the political process they will not be able to participate fully. Till moment most electorate are ignorant of the power they possess in determining who governs, lead or represent them when it comes to politics. They are not aware that

their voter cards are the power they can use to replace the non performing representative with their new choice since, according to Abraham Lincoln in a speech in 1856, “the ballot is stronger than the bullet” (p. 191). However, with television’s overwhelming reach and influence on the society, all the baits by political parties and their candidates to curry electoral favour and vote are made points of focus for election campaigns. If success must grace an election, the deciders; voters, must be aware, informed and knowledgeable about political activities of the election. As electorate, they may vote sensibly enough for anybody or party unless they are armed with sufficient and enough information, and this responsibility lies at the doorsteps of the mass media, and in this case, the television.

Television provides voluntary political education to the public as well as mounts political enlightenment of the masses. Political awareness requires for its sustenance, a free flow of communication and information. The flow must be reciprocal, and not a one-way flow from those in authority to the masses. The masses must also be able to communicate their needs, preferences, attitudes and suggestions to their leaders and representatives. Television has been in the business of ensuring this exchange of information in addition to its traditional responsibility of informing, educating and entertaining the masses.

The mass media (television) promote and support a good and sustained political culture in which there is interactivity between and among all sectors in the society. Sustained political culture however, leads to political sophistication, which, according to Nwosu (1990, p.39), is the inclination to respond to political stimuli as well as political knowledge gained through a spiral process of acquisition in which the mass media, level of group participation, education level and economic position interact to determine an individual’s or group’s level of sophistication. The television mounts definite programmes of political education more far-reaching than other media of communication. This is because of its ability to transcend the barriers of illiteracy through the use of appropriate language as well as its audio-visual peculiarity.

The television not only influence political campaigns and voting, it could be used to make an impact in the political environment by achieving the following: Creating awareness about a candidate and his campaign issues and manifesto and even party ideology; making available adequate and clear political information to the target audience; teaching the target audience about election procedures, time table good conduct at election venue, and directing target audience to make good voting decision by setting political agenda for them.

The thrust of political campaign is to achieve an effective political mobilization as well as packaging and marketing political parties and their candidates to the electorate (Ezebuenyi and Ejezieh 2012, p. 285). Today, campaign has become so imperative that

you cannot divorce it from politics. Okigbo, (1999, p. 128) identifies the place of campaigns in politics when he said that election are won and lost largely on the ability of the campaign manager to use communication effectively. Political campaign is a strategy employed by political parties and candidates to persuade voters to cast their votes for them in an election.

Election is a vital part of democratic process. Voters involvement in an election enables a nation to democratically choose its leaders based on their perception, information and understanding of the candidates and as well as their conviction and confidence on the ability of the candidate to deliver or perform creditably when voted to the office. When a nation claims to be a democratic society, it is not achieved by selection but by election. The electorates are the ones to choose who becomes their next president, governor, senator, chairman, etc.

According to Ani, (2011, p. 250) the underlining reason for the electoral activities is to influence the voters and secure political power. Most candidates do their homework on how to influence the electorate. They have to understand the electorate's interest, need and what might dissuade them from voting. From the above position by Ani (2011), one can understand that politics involves the participation of the masses. To gain a large turn up of voters in an election, a widely owned and accessible channel of communication (the television precisely) should be used for campaigns, political education, mobilizations and in fact throughout the political process.

The television is expected to possess the power to adequately inform the electorate on political developments. Create awareness and guide voters' behaviour. Political campaigns are meant to motivate the voters to gain their votes for a political party that sponsored the campaigns. Political campaign can in addition to television be channeled through radio, newspapers, magazines, internet, billboards, posters, handbills and through face-to-face communication. It is however most appropriate to use television (because of its many advantages) to propagate the aims of the campaigns sponsors. Therefore, this study seeks to examine AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign influence on voters in Asaba Metropolis of Delta State.

Statement of Problems

Citizen's participation in election can be influenced by the quality of information available to them. Political socialization and communication are avenues of sharing some political information. We are living in a media world: a world saturated by the mass media. During election periods, television stations, and other media outlets, literally suffuse viewers with information about the various contestants, the voting procedures, the actual dates for voting and similar issues. Television can direct public attention to particular issues because of the pictures it paints. Television broadcasts literally influence the picture in the minds of the voting public. Voters' participation or

apathy has resulted from information shared during election times on television programmes. Thus, information can affect behaviour either positively or negatively.

Political campaigns create an enabling environment for both dialogue and the marketing of persuasive information in modern democracies worldwide. The dominance and prevalence of democracy as a popular form of government cannot be isolated from man's inalienable right to freedom in its various ramifications, which democracy espouses as a culture. However, for emerging democracies in Africa such as Nigeria, this freedom to choose is fundamentally the "joker in the pack" that has made even the worst caricatures of democracy preferable over and above every facets of dictatorship, no matter how benevolent. The corollary of this is that political campaign was either utterly disregarded by the political actors or improperly packaged to serve its purpose of appealing to the conscience of the electorate. For the medium is the message, appropriate delivery mechanism and choice of the media ensure maximum result.

The substance of the problem here therefore boards on the critical role of the African Independent Television (AIT) on engendering the culture of persuasiveness and constructive debate enmeshed in political campaigns. Can it therefore be said that AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages enhanced Asaba Metropolis electorate's participation during the election? This is the problem the researcher seeks to unravel.

Objectives of the Study

The study sets out to examine AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign influence on voters' participation in Asaba Metropolis. In specific terms, the objectives of the study include:

- i. To find out respondents' level of exposure to the AIT's 2015 presidential election campaigns.
- ii. To ascertain the extent AIT's 2015 presidential election campaigns enhanced voters' participation in Asaba Metropolis.
- iii. To determine the candidates' campaign message in the 2015 presidential election that impressed voters in Asaba Metropolis more.
- iv. To find out if AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages influenced voters in Asaba Metropolis to vote for their candidates in the election
- v. To ascertain if there is a relationship between exposures to AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages and respondents' participation in the election.

Research Questions

For the researchers to be able to carry out this study effectively, the following research questions were formulated:

- i. What was the level of respondents' exposure to AIT's 2015 presidential election campaigns?
- ii. To what extent did AIT's 2015 presidential election campaigns enhanced respondents' participation in the election?
- iii. Which candidates' campaign messages in the 2015 presidential election impressed voters in Asaba Metropolis more?
- iv. Did AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages influenced voters in Asaba Metropolis to vote for their candidates in the election?
- v. Is there a relationship between AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages and respondents' participation in the election?

Research Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages and respondents' participation in the election.

Hi: There is a significant relationship between AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign message and respondent's participation in the election.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign influence on voters' participation with voters in Asaba Metropolis as respondents. The area of study was delimited to the two local government areas that constitute Asaba Metropolis. The choice of Asaba as area of this study is basically the researcher's discretion.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the uses and gratifications theory. The theory was developed in the 1940 and popularized by communication experts like Blumler and Katz (1974), who became interested in the way people engage in various forms of media behaviour. Uses and gratifications theory is audience-centered, it is concerned with what people do with the media (Okenwa, 2002, p.97). The theory presupposes that members of the public will actively selected their interest and motives. Uses and gratifications theory focuses on a part of the process by which media and content choice is generally rational and directed towards certain specific goals and satisfactions (McQuail 2005, p. 424). Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008, p. 71, p.72) posit that uses and gratifications theory takes a more humanistic approach to looking at media use [...] and is the optimist's view of the media.

Konkwo (1999, p.302) asserts that uses and gratifications theory sees the audience as active in freely choosing and selectively using message contents, rather than as passive and "acted upon" by the media as had been the case with the magic bullet theory. In other words, people themselves decide what content they would attend to, from what

medium and personal interests, desires, values and habits of seeking gratifications, influence their decision.

The theory is quite apt to this study because it seeks to address the socio-political needs of the electorate in terms of information, mobilization, education and entertainment. Political campaigns during elections often take into consideration factors which are in line with principles of uses and gratifications theory. Because the theory is audience-centered and addresses needs (intended and unintended), it is obvious the functional media effect theory finds expression in this present study, which sets out to assess the involvement of AIT in campaigns with primary objective to appeal to the conscience of the voters.

An Overview of Television and Political Participation

Watching television is part of the popular culture. In a democratic and pluralistic setting, voters watch television to source for news and information on the government and election. Lang and Lang (1959) feel that news media influence extend far beyond political campaigns. According to them,

All news that bears on political activity and belief-and only campaign speechless and campaign propaganda-is somehow relevant to the vote. Not only during the campaigns, but also, in the periods between. The mass media provide perspectives, shapes image of candidates and parties, help highlight issues around which a campaign will develop, and define the unique atmosphere and areas of sensitivity, which mark any particular campaigns (p.226).

Television as an audiovisual mass channel has been vigorously employed in election. It brings into millions of homes what is happening on the political front, especially the campaigns. As Dye, Zeigler and Lichter (1992, p.4) observe, television is essential in present day election and is “our most significant form of mass communicating that is, communication that reaches nearly everyone: the poor, to illiterates, the aged, the sick, children...” According to them, television has replaced the political parties as the main link between the candidates and the voters. The candidates can bypass the parties and appeal directly to the voters. Those that appear on television are perceived as some more serious (p.125). Ross (1996, p. 324) remarks that television is the most cost-effective way to reach the public as message can be tailor-made to reach specific voters.

Cohen and Nice (2003, p. 80) are of the opinion that television gives the political candidates more opportunities to communicate with the public directly rather than passing through party organization, Therefore, media intrusion theorists like Davis (1990) claim that the media, especially television, have intruded into politics and undermined political party control over elections Patterson (1980) argues that

television has replaced the political parties in the election processes as the candidate use television to promote their own interest and not the interest of their parties.

Keeter (1987), and Lang and Lang (1968), lament that the rise of television has introduced a more image-based political setting that lays emphasis on a candidate's personal qualities. As Graber, (1990, p. 138) explains, "people draw a multitude of inferences from human physical appearance and movement.... Many people infer personality characteristics from human physical features."

Today, the mass media, especially the television, are being used by politicians are those seeking for elective offices as their "soap box" because they avail these politicians and office seekers the opportunity reach out to, and interact with prospective voters. This supports Forrest and Marks` (1999) remark that contemporary election campaigns are progressively more dominated by national television, radio and press coverage with the attendance financial resources required by political parties to run such campaigns considerable and escalating. According to Woll and Binkstock (1991), the most important impact of television in presidential politics is perhaps the expansion of the coverage of the horse race and of the personalities of the candidates, particularly during the primaries. Television has brought more exposure that is public and made the candidates and their styles of overriding importance. This makes it more difficult for them and their advisers to manipulate the public than they could have done with other media that gives them less exposure.

Why is there so much interest in using television during elections? Baran (2004, p. 450) respond that it is because television is the primary source of public affairs information. Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones (2003, p 154) add three more reasons. Their first reason is that television has touched and changed politics. Their second reason is that television has the strongest persuasive power because it mimics face-to-face communication. Their third reason is that television has eroded the roles of opinion leaders. According to them, the television newscasters have now become the opinion leaders. However, they qualify that television's impact is partly still dependent on the discussion the viewers have with their families and friends after watching its programmes. Gerbner (1990, p. 261) confirms that television gives us much of what we think about, know or do in common.

Sometimes the electorate vote for candidates based on the good character they perceive such a candidates possess, and not necessarily because they belong to the same political party with such candidate/s. Their decisions might have been influenced based on how they judged such a candidate when he appeared on television to campaign. Druckman (2003) discovers that television images matter in politics because they significantly affect overall debates evaluations, prime people to rely more on personality perceptions in their own evaluation of the candidates, enhance what

people learn and may have indeed played an important role in the first Kennedy-televised Nixon debates. Druckman (2003, p. 560) concludes that television substantially shapes political attitude and learning with the implication being that television viewers have access to visual imagery and nonverbal cues that often play important roles in shaping peoples' assessment of others.

Gould (1998), Holmes and Holmes (1998) explain why politicians their adviser and professional pollster continue to use the television. They note even at the last minutes, a good election campaign message can cause a vital shift in the voting convictions and consequently change the belief of at least the wavering voters who have not firmly decided on who to vote for. Mackuen (1984) explain that television's political information and awareness. However, those with higher levels of prior interest will still watch television's image and remain unaffected because the screen pictures do not adequately upset their more refined evaluations.

Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones (2003) write that television has changed politics in three different ways through nomination of candidate based on the bandwagon effect, turning itself into a kingmaker and making politicians to schedule and strategies as to how capture television attention. They add that bandwagon affect enhance recognition and generates subsequent television coverage. But has television's entrance into politics weakened or increased the citizen's participation in election? Roskin, Cord, Medeiros and Jones (2003) seem to agree with the explanation that television creates apathy and passivity, which in turn lower election-day turnouts. They observe that television saturates the viewers, in advance with the frequent coverage of the candidates that the voters lose inters voting. Baran and Davis (2003) have the same opinion about television creating voters' apathy because many people stay at homes to watch what is happening than in participating.

Television is key when it concerns the aspirations of the electorate because it serves as one of the medium through which candidates sell themselves and their manifestoes to the electorate. As Lowden, Anderson, Dozier and Lauzen (1994) comment, the voters who focus on candidates image consult television broadcast while those more interest in issues examine the newspapers.

Political Campaigns Influence on the Voters

Campaigns condition and recondition the minds of the voters, and they affect or reflect people's political cultures, the most affective medium as well as strategy for campaign. Election campaigns avail candidates contesting for elections to ask for the votes of the electorate. According to Oboh (2015, p. 75), contestants in elections usually carry out political campaigns in the places where they publicly declare their candidacy together with the programmes and manifestoes of their parties, which they intend to implement for the benefit of their people when they are elected into office.

Since politics is a game of number, the ultimate aim of politicians in employing political campaign is to attract a mass number of voters, more so, to influence them to believe and behave in certain manners. Mazey (1996, p. 123) discloses that in the French context, “prominent campaign issues, public opinion polls and debates, together with the programmes put forward by candidates and their parties usually constitute important indicators of the current socio-political problems, public concerns and competitive policy agendas of the country.”

Hence, when voters are exposed to campaigns and political information they are better placed to decide whether to participate in the electoral process by voting or not voting since Dalton (2002) believes that, “voting is the one activity that binds the individual to the political system and legitimises the rest of the democratic process” (Dalton in Stromback and Johansson, 2007, p. 80).

The truth is that the media calls the shot when it comes to elections anywhere in the world, right from the time of campaigns and through the election period. According to Nwosu (2009, p.2), the 2008 presidential election in America seemed to confirm that cable news had become “the primary television platform of American political discourse.” This corroborates Vivian’s (2005, p. 183) assertion that, “today, it is rare for a candidate for public office not to use television to solicit support. In fact, as presidential campaigns geared up for the year 2004, campaign managers looked for volunteers less to make door-to-door and other in-person contacts with voters than to help raise funds for television advertising.”

A study carried out by Atkin and Heald (1976) made a strong case for the influence of political campaign on voters’ behaviour. In their quantitative study of the effects of political campaigns, the data available to them after the study revealed that political campaigns have effect on voters’ knowledge and interest. Arguing further, Oboh (2015) says that, during election campaigns, political candidates meet with the members of their constituencies to discuss the problems affecting the growth and development of their communities, and how the candidates intend to solve the problems when elected into office (75).

Every serious public office contender must marshal out effective media campaign, not only to create awareness about his or her intention, but also to win the votes of potentials voters; those of them who understand the significant roles a medium like the television play in elections go all out to budget heavily for their media campaigns especially during elections.

The Origin of Political Campaigns in Nigeria

Historically, partisan politics began in Nigeria in the pre-independence era. The packaging and marketing of politicians in those days was unlike the way it is done in these modern days. This is due to the fact politics then was not the utmost general

interest or concern of the masses rather it was the concern of the ruling class as many people were disenfranchised. Hence, there is little need for wider advertising of candidates. Nzeribe, (1992, p.45) in his analysis of evolution of political campaign in Nigeria said:

Before independence in 1960, colonial administration has organized couple of general elections. In none of them was a deliberate and systematic marketing communication programme undertaken. All political activities were limited to rallies, speeches and where possible, press electoral efforts.

Interestingly, the attainment of independence in 1960 gave room for greater participation. Consequently, this witnessed greater development as regards the organized effort to persuade voters to choose one candidate over the other. In all fairness and truth, it is clear that Nigeria's first and second republic politics were ethnic based, people voted for those they affiliate with based on ethnicity or religion.

However, the campaigns during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria were something else. It goes without saying that political campaign has met the required maturity in Nigerian politics following the heavy political campaigns witnessed. Today, most times, candidates spend their personal money, and dedicate more of their personal resources in campaigning for elective offices, thereby relying less on their political parties. This is not to say that political parties no longer have a role to play in campaign now, they exist mainly to support campaign by ensuring democratic procedure or providing services of fund to party candidates.

Today, however, Nigerian politicians learn about voters interest by contracting for public opinion polls, they plan their plan strategy by hiring political consultants to device clever "sound bite" (brief, catchy, phrases) that catch voters' attention. They design the message to voters by conducting a media campaign no longer by counting on party leaders to canvas to neighbors.

The Interface between the Media Political Advertising in Nigeria

The media have played crucial roles in the growth and development of societies. As Schramm and Porter (1982) observe, the media have been involved in every significant social change since they came into existence. Reinforcing the above position, Gitlin (1980) posits that in many societies, people have come to rely almost entirely on the media for information and explanation of significant events in politics, business, history, commerce etc.

In the area of politics, the media have been employed in selling political parties, their candidates, programmes and policies. Furthermore the media have played and continue to play very significant roles in shaping the political process, through the coverage of

elections, party activities and showcasing policies and programmes of governments. It becomes imperative to say that the powers of the media in the political process cannot be over-emphasized. Norman (1985) cited in Nwosu (1992) while acknowledging the above fact said we live in an age which is characterized by the wide spread use of various channels of communication (including political advertising media) for a broad range of political and other purposes. This comment by Norman reflects the great influence that the media wield in the political process.

In many developed and developing countries, political marketing takes place at government, corporate, organizational and individual levels (Samaila, 2003). In Nigeria political marketing is employed on various fronts. These include the marketing of government programmes, using predominantly state-owned media houses (television and radio stations and the print media outfits). Many politicians in the ruling political parties seeking re-election have and continue to use such state broadcast station to market their programmes, in addition to the use of the social media and merely recently, large billboards. Political marketing is used to sell party activities and programmes and market candidate vying for various offices.

Using the Media for Effective Electioneering Campaigns in Nigeria

An informed society, they say, is a rich society. In other to establish a robust arid information rich society, adequate communication is necessary and a media house that has distinguished itself will definitely excel especially in the present political juggernaut around the world. The word “campaign” calls up loathsome memories of unmatched party convention bickering, political discussions debacles, fierce inter-and intra-party wrangling, politics of mudslinging, name calling, black mailing, tension and sworn belligerency (Agba, 2007). Campaign periods are times when politicians, fully bloated with the sense of deceit, poise to use rhetoric, verbose speeches and stylized blandishments to blindfold unspeakably gullible Nigerians. Electioneering campaigns seem to portray a consortium of insincere political figures, whose failure to keep promises dampens the spirit of the electorate and the masses in future elections. It is based on the backdrop of the fore-knowledge of Nigeria unhealthy political culture which should form a springboard for media action.

The mass media and the electorate need to form a solid alliance to force other political actors to operate within prescribed campaign bounds. All that the citizenry wants is an election that reflects their wishes. The media are faced with the “letting in of light and air” in cross fertilizations of ideas that criticize or analyze campaigns issues raised, mainly for those who are little equipped to grasp political jargons should seek out relevant truths for the people who cannot witness or comprehend the events that affected them. Also, in the light of the truth that, “during recent years,” as Cohen (1963, p.27) notes, news has gotten so complex that mere reporting is not good any more. The journalists have to add analysis to campaigns in the light of the electoral

needs of the people. A lot of interpretations and background information are needed to find out the implication of statement and actions to people and to realization of a vibrant political system.

Electioneering campaign reportage should add cohesion by getting all political actors to imbibe democratic rules and principles. This means getting all political actors to truly believe in one Nigeria, to accept the rules which are made to guide the conduct of elections and the process of contesting electoral seats (Agba, 2011). The media must clarify issues during campaigns, bring aspirants close to the electorate; teach the difference between party and candidate to enable the electorate make a wise choice. The media thus must foil attempt by party and opinion leaders to mesmerize those whom they believe must belong to their party on the basis of ethnic considerations. Hence, the ordinary expectation is that the mass media will focus on serious matters that portend serious consequences for the people and their political choices (Okigbo, 1994, p. 194).

The electorate should know what to do with campaign messages, especially when second-term hungry elected office holders saturate media report with phoney contract and projects. Media focus should be to set the correct political agenda for the audience instead of allowing politicians to do so. Politicians can be asked questions on educational policy, tax policy, foreign policy, privatization policy, revenue allocation formular etc. Everything about campaign reporting should serve to guide the electorate on what to do with their votes.

African Independent Television (AIT) in Perspective

AIT is a subsidiary of DAAR Communications Plc. DAAR Communications Plc is the foremost independent broadcast organisation in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, pioneering private/independent broadcasting with the establishment of Ray Power 100.5 FM, AIT, Daarsat - The first fully Nigerian base digital multi-channel direct-to-home subscription TV, and an indigenous station FAAJI FM. AIT political news cut across news on Legislation, Presidency, Political institution and Government Institutions (<http://www.aitonline.tv/live>).

December 6, 1996 heralded the coming of a star in global Satellite Broadcasting, the Africa Independent Television channel 21. AIT provides a fresh slant to TV broadcasting with a unique programming theme that shares the African Experience with the wider global community. AIT channel 21 and AIT International share the same vision and a similar mission. AIT has a unique mission that of sharing the African Experience with the wider global community. With its fascinating cross-cultural theme and vibrant programme content, Africa independent Television (AIT) aims to share everything that is exciting about the African experience with the nations of the world. The station logo and pay-off, AIT - Sharing the African Experience,

symbolizes its vision: to offer on a daily basis, a refreshing but revealing insight into the African experience worldwide. This sentiment is proudly echoed in AIT's corporate identity — AIT, Sharing the African experience.

With a thematic pay-off which emphasises the objective of sharing the unique African experience with the world, AIT's mission is to enhance global understanding through an untainted appreciation of the world and its peoples. Unusual amongst global satellite broadcasting stations, AIT is motivated by uniquely altruistic aims to promote a methodical reduction of tension and friction and foster a greater appreciation of humanity. It is committed to the task of bridging the gap in global communication which places Africa at the ruthless mercy of western perspectives, opinions and nuances. AIT's main task is to project Africa from a holistic African perspective. Untainted, undiluted and absolutely original, AIT offers the world a new insight into the African experience (<http://www.darusa.com/ait>).

Method of Research

The survey research method was used for this study. Survey method is used because it lends itself to the application of samples as a way of studying very large populations. The population of Asaba Metropolis is too large to realistically study without the application of samples.

Area of Study

This study is limited to Asaba Metropolis. The choice of Asaba Metropolis is basically the researchers' discretion.

Population of Study

According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) Official Gazette (2009), the population of Asaba Metropolis is 149,603. However, it is expected this population has increased since the last census exercise. In this situation, Owuamalam, (2012, p. 107) posits that a researcher is expected to use an annual increase rate of 2.28% to work out the new projected population figure. When the calculation is done, in nine years 30,967 persons would have been added to the actual or given population (149,603) to obtain a projected population of 180,570. It is from this population that the sample size was drawn and calculated.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The Taro Yameni's sample size formula (Owuamalam, 2012, pp. 110-144) was used to determine the sample size of 399. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the samples. The main goal for using purposive sampling technique is to ensure that the researcher focused on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest which will best enable answers to research questions. For this study, the characteristics of interest to the researcher are those in the sample, who are exposed to AIT campaign messages during the 2015 presidential.

Method of Data Collection

Questionnaire was used in collecting data for this study. It contains multiple choice questions, open-ended and dichotomous response questions.

Method of Data Presentation and Analysis

Volumes of raw data generated in the study were manually counted and presented in simple frequency distribution tables (statistical tables). Answers to research questions were expressed in simple percentages. Also, appropriate statistical tool, the chi-square (X^2) goodness of fit was used to test the hypotheses formulated. The chi-square was used at 0.05 level of significance $X = (0.5)$ and varying degree of freedom (df).

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 399 copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researcher to residents of Asaba Metropolis. Out of this number, 386 copies were filled, returned and found usable, yielding to 96.7% response rate and the 14 unreturned or badly filled ones constitute 3.3% mortality rate.

Demographic Data Analysis.

Gender distribution of respondents presented indicates that 250 respondents representing 64.8 percent were male while 136 respondents representing 35.2 percent were female. From the analysis, it could be said that majority of the respondents in the study were male. This is true because naturally male gender tend to be more political than their female counterpart.

Also, data presented show that 110 respondents, representing 28.5 percent were between 18-25 years, 92 respondents, representing 23.8 were between 26-31 years, 82 respondents, representing 21.2 percent were between 32-37 years, 62 respondents, representing 16.1 percent were between 38-43 years, 24 respondents, representing 6.2 percent were between 44-49, while 16 respondents representing 4.2 percent were between 50 years and above. From the above analysis, it becomes safe to say that majority of the respondents in this study were within the age brackets classified as youth.

Respondents` marital status presented indicates that 268 respondents, representing 69.4 percent were single while 118 respondents, representing 30.6 percent were married. This analysis goes to further state that majority of the respondents in this study were youths hence most of them are still single.

Data of the education qualification of respondents shows that 20 or 52 percent of the respondents were FSLC holders, 180 or 46.6 percent of the respondents were GCE/SSCE holders, 80 or 20.7 percent were OND/NCE holders, 66 or 17.1 percent of the respondents were First degree/HND holders while 40 or 10.4 percent of the

respondents were postgraduates. From the analysis above, it is clear that majority of the respondents were undergraduates (youths).

Occupational distribution of respondents indicates that 168 (43.5%) were students, 98 (25.4%) were public servants, 80 (20.7%) were in business while 40 (10.4%) were unemployed. This shows that majority of the respondents were students.

Thematic Data: Answer to Research Questions

Research Question One

To what extent were voters in Asaba Metropolis exposed to AIT's 2015 presidential election campaigns? (Questionnaire Item No.6).

Analysis of data shows that 82 or 21.2 percent of the respondents answered very often when asked the frequency of their exposure to political campaign messages on AIT during the 2015 presidential election, 110 or 28.5 percent answered often, while 92 or 23.8 percent answered sometimes 62 or 16.1 answered rarely, 24 or 6.2 answered don't know while 16 or 4.2 answered not at all. Consequent upon the result of this analysis, it can be said that majority of the respondents received political campaign messages quite often from AIT during the 2015 presidential election.

Research Question Two

To what extent did AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages enhanced voters' participation in the election? (Questionnaire Item No.8).

Analysis of data shows that 88 or 22.8 percent of the respondents answered "very well" when asked whether AIT's 2015 presidential election campaigns enhanced electoral participation, 98 or 25.4 percent answered "well", 47 or 12.2 percent answered "fairly well", 67 or 17.4 percent answered "not well" while 86 or 22.2 percent answered "can't say". From the analysis, it can be said that a good percentage of the respondent confirmed that political campaign messages on AIT enhanced electoral participation during the 2015 presidential election.

Research Question Three Which candidates' campaign messages in the 2015 presidential election impressed voters in Asaba Metropolis more? (Questionnaire Item No.14).

Analysis of data presented in Table 9 shows that 233 or 60.4percent of the respondents indicated that Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's campaign message impressed them more, 91 or 23.6 percent said it was Mohammadu Buhari's, 46 or 21.8 percent said it is Dr Chekwa Okorie's, 16 or 4.1 percent said it is Chief Sam Eke's while 36 or 9.3 said it is Comfort Sonaiya's. This is an indication that an overwhelming majority of the respondents were impressed by Goodluck Jonathan's campaign message(s).

Research Question Four

Did AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages influenced voters in Asaba Metropolis to vote for their candidates in the election (Questionnaire Item No.11).

Analysis of data in shows that 84 or 21.8 percent of the respondents answered “very well” when asked whether AIT’s 2015 presidential election campaigns enhanced voters’ participation in the 2015 presidential election, 102 or 26.4 percent answered “well”, 44 or 11.4 percent answered “fairly well”, 60 or 15.5 percent answered “not well” while 96 or 24.9 percent answered “can’t say”. From the analysis, it can be said that a good percentage of the respondents confirmed that political campaign messages on AIT enhanced electoral participation during the 2015 presidential election.

Research Question Five

Is there a relationship between exposure to AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages and voters' participation in the election? (Questionnaire Item No. 16).

Analysis of data presented shows that 64 or 16 percent of the respondents answered “very well” when asked whether there is relationship between exposure to AIT’s 2015 presidential election campaign messages and voters’ participation in election, 38 or 10 percent answered “well”, 103 or 27 percent answered “fairly well” 60 or 16 percent answered “not at all” while 120 or 31 percent answered “can’t say.” This means that majority of the respondents agreed that there is relationship between exposure to AIT 2015 presidential election campaign messages during the election and voters’ actual participation in the election.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between AIT’s 2015 presidential election campaign messages and voters’ participation in election.

To generate data to test hypothesis one, the researcher consulted table 11. The chi square goodness of fit was used in testing the hypothesis

The result shows that the X^2_c (58.3) is greater than the X^2_t (7.78), the researchers therefore rejects the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative hypothesis. It becomes imperative to say that there is significant relationship between exposure to AIT 2015 presidential election campaign messages and voters’ participation in the election.

Discussion of Findings

From the data presented and analysed, the following results were obtained: The researcher found that majority of the respondents agreed to have had a good exposure to AIT’s 2015 presidential election campaign messages. This finding agrees with an earlier submission by Aririguzoh (2009) who said that television is a key actor in the electoral process, because it links those seeking votes to the voters. On this study, it

was found that AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages enhanced voters' participation during the election. This finding also draws support from an earlier observation by Baran (2004) that television has the strongest persuasive power because it mimics face-to-face communication.

It was also found that the candidate's campaign message(s) that impressed the respondents more is that of Dr Goodluck Jonathan. In this, an overwhelming majority of the respondents numbering 233 or 60.4 percent actually indicated that they were more impressed by Goodluck Jonathan's campaign message(s). This tends to draw support from the fact that Goodluck Jonathan and his PDP actually won the election on popular support in Delta State. This finding shows that television can affect the decision of the viewers on who to vote for based on what he has seen.

The study also revealed that there is a relationship between exposure to AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages and respondents' participation in the election. The result of this analysis in Table 10 reveals that 53 percent of the respondents tend to agree with this assertion. Agreeing to this, Gould (1998), Holmes and Holmes (1998), aver that a good campaign message on television can cause a vital shift in the voting convictions and consequently change the beliefs of at least the wavering voters who have not firmly decided on who to vote for.

Conclusion

From this study, it is so glaring that television, being a popular medium of public communication, can be used effectively to reach the electorate and mobilise them to take part in elections because it purveys information which could be used to stimulate voters into more active political participation or apathy during elections; this was why AIT's 2015 election campaign messages enhanced voters' participation during the election. This goes a long way to prove that there is a relationship between exposure to AIT's 2015 presidential election campaign messages and respondents' participation in election. It can therefore be concluded that the respondents had a good exposure to AIT's 2015 presidential election campaigns; this tends to validate the major objectives for which the study was set to investigate.

Recommendations

Owing to the findings of the study, the following recommendations were put forward:

- i. Since television has proven to be the best medium for political campaign message dissemination, candidates vying for elective positions are advised to employ its magical features in reaching the electorate.
- ii. In addition to using television for political campaigns, political candidates and political parties should always consider other factors that could help them persuade the electorate to vote for them during election.

- iii. Television stations should avoid projecting candidates who have nothing to offer the electorate.
- iv. AIT must always give equal opportunities to all candidates.

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