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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Political Advertisement Interjection in the Ondo State Governorship Election Debate Programme on Channels-TV

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Abstract

Political advertisement is used for the stimulation of voting participation interest in an election. Governorship candidates need opportunities in reaching the electorate for support. It is different from a political debate which brings candidates before the electorate for assessment on how each of them would address specific issues of concern to them. It facilitates a political decision-making process for the electorate. This study aimed at ascertaining television audience perception of political debate disruption with political advertisements during the debate programme of the Ondo State governorship election on Channels-TV,7th October, 2020.The survey research method was used to obtain data from television viewers in Awka, Enugu and Owerri. A sample of 384 obtained through the Cozby's formula was allocated to the three study centres using the parity method. The purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the centres. The social judgement theory was used for explaining obtained results. The study found that political advertisements are unnecessary in a political debate programme because a majority of the respondents were aware of the different programme strategies and therefore did not endorse the used programme style. It also found that audience interest was not respected since content other than what the candidates say at the debate was imported to disrupt the decision-making process for the voter. It concluded that political advertisement interjection in a political debate programmewas unnecessary. The study recommended that the adjacency advertising approach or the break approach be avoided to make political debate programme achieve its primary objective of candidate evaluation for vote consideration. The strategy qualifies as a vote buying strategy for candidates whose political advertisements are presented in the political debate programme.

Key words: Political advertisement, debate, programme, interjection

Introduction

Classical postulations see election as a consensus on who is best qualified to govern a state (Nwosu, 2011; Unamka, 2006). The scholars believe that since governance is a social contract between the ruler and the ruled or the governor and the governed, unfetted access should be given to the citizens to decide who should govern them (Ezeani, 2010). The electorate deserves vital information on candidates who aspire to become their governor by exposing those aspirants to fair and equal opportunities in responding to how each would deal with issues of public concern. This is the origin of political debate as advanced by Nimmo and Sanders (1981). The debate programme on television is one of such opportunities given to the aspirants to address issues considered germane in a political constituency. The voters who watch the television debate become better informed to make rational political decisions.

On Wednesday, 7th October, 2020, the Channels-TV presented a political debate programme at 7.30p.m featuring only the All Progressive Congress (APC) candidate who was later joined in the programme by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate. The candidates of other political parties were absent as participants in that political debate. The programme contained political advertisements from only the APC and the PDP candidates which were shown as breaks in the political debate programme. It became necessary to know how television viewers from outside the "Political battlefield" – Ondo State –who watched the programme reacted to the programme format since elections are recurring decimals in Nigeria. This is the essence of the current study.

Statement of the Problem

How to rationalize choice of a candidate from an objective evaluation process by voters is a problem in elections. It means that voters need to be aided

with vital information about each candidate aside from the glamour of political advertisements. The political debate seems to provide the basis for rational thinking and political decision making. It is at the debate that the realities of competence are exposed through how each candidate addresses similar issues of concern within the constituency of the election. Is it necessary for the desired candidate information by voters to be assisted by political advertisements at the candidates' evaluation point, usually a few days to the election? What role will political advertisements of candidates play for them when presented in the political debate programme?

Political debate programmes are new to election processes in Nigeria particularly within the ambits of democratic dispensation. It is an imported programme concept from older democracies like the United States of America. It becomes necessary to ensure that the sacrosanctity of the programme format is brought under scrutiny for the advancement of knowledge on audience reaction to disruptions of the debate programme flow by political advertisement interruptions. The study investigates the desirability of political debate disruption by political advertisements and its consequence on audience interest.

Study Objectives

The general objective of this study is to determine television audience perception of political debate disruption with political advertisements. It specifically investigated:

1. The level of audience endorsement of political debate disruption with political advertisement.
2. The extent of positive public opinion on the programming strategy.

Study Questions

The two questions posed to direct the study were:

1. What is the level of audience endorsement of political debate disruption with political advertisements?
2. What is the extent of positive public opinion on the programme style?

Research Hypotheses

The two hypotheses formulated to guide the study were:

H_1: Political debate audience interest is served by political advertisement interruptions.

H_2: Voter decision is affected where political advertisements interrupt political debate programme.

Scope of the study

The television viewers in Awka, Enugu and Owerri participated in the study. The choice of focusing the study on audience outside Ondo State was to provide an unbiased insight into programme evaluation by persons who did not vote in that election. The select participants were expected to generate data required for addressing the study objectives. Only those who watched the television debate of Wednesday, 7th October, 2020, presented by the Channels-TV and involving candidates at the 2020 Ondo State governorship election, participated as respondents in the study.

Limitations

It was not easy to identify television viewers in the select study centres. The satellite dishes and reception antennas helped the researchers to identify households and offices that have television viewers in the area studied. The respondents were willing to participate since they did not participate in the voting process in Ondo State. However, some television viewers declined participation since they felt that the study was commercial in nature or politically motivated. However, they were told its academic nature, and that it was designed to improve TV programme content presented for public consumption. This explanation persuaded them to participate in the study.

Theoretical Framework

The social judgment theory was found apt to explain obtained result in the study. The theory postulated by Sherif, Sherif and Hoveland (1975) asserts that the communication content consumer has an anchor or a baseline which Oskamp (1981) and Ginika chukwu (2020) believe form the basis for

assessing an in-coming message (Miller, 2002). The presented message is evaluated by the receiver. If the message falls into the latitude of acceptance, it is assimilated but if it falls into the latitude of rejection, then it is contrasted. Our interest is not in the latitude of non-commitment which has no specified opinion direction.

The content of both the political debate and political advertisements are assessed by the receiver since both are within the realm of persuasive political communication. They are designed to influence voter behaviour to change from where it is to where the content wants it to be. The contents belong to two distinct programme types but within the gamut of voter persuasion. The debate provides live content as it is happening in a "transient and ephemeral" manner (Owuamalam, 2017) different from the frozen and televised political advertisement with eulogized narratives designed for brain-washing the voter as a persuasive strategy. Both formats therefore provide different contents for voter consideration. This viewpoint explains why any blend of the two at the same time may generate an entropy or otherwise which could affect voter behaviour arising from content variations in programme objectives.

Conceptual Discussion

Kaid (1981) sees political advertising as using content which is political in persuading support for a cause. Bitzer (1981) agrees that the rhetorical presentation of evidence as proofs makes political advertisements provide the potency for influencing rational thinking in line with the source's desired objective. Owuamalam (2008) believes that the use of political advertisement is to deploy a creatively constructed content to deal with the sensibilities of its receiver by framing (McCombs, 1981; Miller, 2002)how they should think and behave towards a particular candidate. It shows that political advertising plays the same role like its product counterpart aimed as inducing persuasion and patronage. Such effects were expected in the political advertisements used by Channels-TV during the 7th October political debate for governorship candidates. The advertisements were expected to aid the candidates to persuade voters to support their political interest. It is therefore a persuasive form of political communication (Nimmo & Sanders, 1981).

Political debate provides the voter an opportunity to physically see the candidates on television, and assess their nuances and capabilities as they respond to questions of interest in their political constituency where a choice is expected in an election. Obi (2018) agrees that a governorship election debate removes the cosmetic creations of political advertisements and exposes the candidate to face realities associated with public interest. Her study of the Anambra State governorship election debate of 2017 gave an opportunity for the candidates to face the voters unaided by any other form of communication from any other source in presenting their justification for voter consideration and support at the election.

The import is that a political debate is designed to achieve a specific programme objective which becomes questionable when content foreign to the programme format is used in the persuasive communication. It is unlike the televised football match where the spectator's consideration and persuasion is not needed in deciding its outcome. The audience in this case is not subjected to the vagaries of mental contraptions and rational thinking associated with candidates' evaluation. Advertisers therefore exploit the pooling of a large audience, seeking entertainment to showcase their products or services through advertisements. It is the level of audience involvement and the nature of the programme objective that differentiate sports as entertainment and debate as educational.

Advertising is the process of collecting and arranging artistic elements in an orderly and logical manner in order to use obtained content to induce patronage persuasion. Owuamalam (2017) sees this strategy as target-audience oriented even in public service announcements or presentation. It is a packed programme whose content is expected to attract audience attention, arouse their interest in the presented item or issue and elicit patronage response from those exposed to such contents. It is the content from advertising that is referred to as

advertisement, (Ozoh, 2012) as the product of advertising. It was such content that was imported into another programme type with a different audience interest.

Owuamalam (2017) asserts that three major issues are to be considered in programme presentation in broadcasting. He articulates them as station's purpose, audience interest and programme objective. It is through station's purpose that differentiations arise as to which is a news station, like CNN, Arise, Channels-TV, BBC-News or TVC-News; entertainment stations like the various movie stations on multichoice; the mixed grill stations like the AIT, Silverbird and the NTA that provide content for different audience consumption or the Nat-Geo Wild and Discovery Channels with information content. It is audience interest that supports a station to succeed. It must therefore meet audience expectation above its interest for its patronage horizon to be expanded. This view gives credence to why audience share evaluation is of interest to broadcast stations, for both programming and rate card considerations. It may be the anticipated audience size from the political debate programme that might have advised the inclusion of the vexed political advertisements by Channels-TV that necessitated this study.

Study Methodology

The survey research design provided the researchers an opportunity to go into the field (Awka, Enugu and Owerri) where the investigated phenomenon (political television content involving debate and advertisements) existed and was watched by television viewers. Wimmer and Dominick (2012) believe that the field research experience of the survey research method enables a study to obtain credible and reliable data for addressing a research problem. Again, since the entire television viewers in the three cities were not easily accessed, then a cross-section study (Nwodu, 2017) becomes vital as a study design. The representative nature of the survey method enabled the generalization of obtained result across the population of interest to the study. The justifications show why the survey research method was used in this study.

Population of the Study

The population of television viewers who are adults and qualify as voters in the three cities of Akwa, Enugu and Owerri is unknown because there is no authentic census of television viewers in Nigeria. Again, the population of voters in the three cities seems unknown since each of the cities contains voters and viewers from wards within more than one municipality or local government area. For instance Enugu is made up of Enugu North and Enugu South local government areas. Awka constitutes Awka North and Awka South while the boundary of Owerri crosses into Owerri North and even Mbaitoli and Owerri West where the 15km radius development authority of each city is considered. However, this study assumes that the population of television viewers in the three study centres exceeds 100,000. It is this population that is of interest (Nworgu, 2000) in this study.

Sample and sampling Technique

Owuamalam (2010) believes that sample is a faithful representation of population. The Cozby's (1973) formula at 5% error margin for a population exceeding 100,000 is placed at 384. It is this sample size that was used in the study.

The purposive sampling technique was used to select the three cities where the study is situated. State capitals were considered since they constitute a melting-point for literate citizens capable of understanding the English language used in both the political debate and the political advertisements. The opinionaire was used as the measuring instrument since it was the opinion of respondents that was needed as data for the study. Also, the opinionaire made it possible for the researchers to complete issues related to the study with the respondents at each visit since a revisit and repeated access to the same respondents was not guaranteed. The tool for data collection was used after verification for validity through structural and statistical competence test and certification for reliability through the test and retest method. The study was concluded in 21 days from the date of the debate so as to enable the respondents remember the used television programme in the ex-post facto

study.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The obtained data were analyzed using simple percentage for the research questions and Likert scale or weighted mean method for testing the formulated hypotheses in the study. The decision point for accepting or rejecting any hypothesis was placed at 3.0. Also, mean value lower than the decision point value rejects the null hypothesis, H_O, and accepts its alternate, H_1, and vice versa. The theory adopted for the study was used to discuss obtained result. Frequency tables were used to classify and categorize data for easier comprehension.

The six items in the used opinionaire were as follows:

1. Was it necessary to place political advertisement of candidates in the political debate programme?
   (a) Necessary [ ] (b) Not necessary [ ]
   © Can't really say [ ]
2. Why do you hold your opinion?
   _____
3. The viewers' interest was served by the presented political commercial within the debate programme.
   (a) Strongly agree [ ] (b) Agree [ ] (c) Not sure [ ] (d) Disagree [ ] (e) Strongly disagree [ ]
4. How do you consider the use of political commercial in-between the political debate programme?
   (a) Favourable [ ] (b) Not favourable [ ]
   (c) Can't really say [ ]
5. What is your opinion on the presented commercial breaks?
   _____
6. Advertisements within political debate programme confuses assessment basis for voter decision-making.
   (a) Strongly agree [ ] (b) Agree [ ] (c) Not sure [ ]
   (d) Disagree [ ] (e) Strongly disagree [ ]

Copies of the opinionaire were distributed to the respondents in two areas in each city using the convenience approach: Enugu – Uwani and Ogui; Owerri – Aladimma and Ikenegbu; Awka – Udoka and Umuokpu. The study found that 19 copies or 4.95% were invalid because 12 were not duly responded to due to domestic and official distractions while 7 answered off the point. It means that 365 copies or 95.05% were used as valid for the study.

Study Question One

What is the level of audience endorsement of external content presentation within the debate programme?

Item 1 in the opinionaire was used to know whether the disruption of the political debate programme was necessary. Obtained data were analyzed as follows:

Table 1: Necessity of Political Debate Disruption with Political Commercials

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Necessary	80	21.92
Not necessary	187	51.23
Can't really say	98	26.85
Total	365	100.00

Results above show that more than half of the respondents or 51.23% believed that the disruption was unnecessary while less than one-quarter or 21.92% said it was necessary and the undecided accounted for more than one-quarter at 26.85. It shows that those who felt it was not necessary were more than those who agreed by a difference of more than one-quarter or29.31%. Again, those who disagreed were greater than those who either agreed, or were undecided combined. It means that a majority of the respondent believed that the disruption was unnecessary.

Also, item 2 in the opinionaire sought to find respondents' reason for their views on the disruption of the debate programme by candidates' political advertisement. Obtained data were analyzed as follows:

Table 2: Reasons for Provided Responses

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Station's commercial interest	147	40.27
Vote buying for candidates	103	28.22
Candidates assistance with the advertisements	73	20.00
Not certain of the reason	42	11.51
Total	365	100.00

Results above show that while two-fifths or 40.27 believed that the station's commercial interest propelled the disruption, more than one-quarter or 28.22% believed that the intrusion of the political advertisements was designed to buy votes for the candidates while one-fifth or 20% claimed that the disruption with the advertisement was external assistance and less than one-fifth or 11.51% held no specified opinion. It means that a majority of the respondents believed that the station's economic consideration encouraged the use of political commercials in a political debate programme.

Again, the posed research question was answered using item 3 in the opinionaire. The item sought to know whether the political advertisement disrupted the debate programme viewer's interest. Obtained data were analyzed as follows:

Table 3: Respondents Perception of Presented Political Commercials

Item 3 Presented	Response						Total	Mean value $\bar{x}$
commercials serve viewers interest in the political debate programme presented for audience consumption	Code	SA=5	A=4	UD=3	D=2	SD=1	15	981
	Frequency	24	92	46	152	51	365	365
	Code value result	120	368	138	304	51	81	=2.69
	%	6.58	25.21	12.60	41.64	13.97	100.00	$\bar{x}$ = 2.69

Results above show that while 31.79% or less than one-third agreed that the commercial disruption was in the viewers' interest, 55.61% or more than half of the respondents disagreed while the others, less than one-fifth, were undecided. It means that a majority of the respondents believed that the commercial disruption was not in the interest of the debate programme audience.

Study Question Two

What is the extent of positive public opinion on the disruption of the political debate programme by commercials?

Item 4 in the opinionaire was used to know how the programme audience viewed the disruption of the political debate programme content flow with political advertisement of the candidate. Obtained data were analyzed as follows:

Table 4: Programme Audience View on Commercial Breaks

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Favourable	105	28.77
Not favourable	159	43.56
Can't really say	101	27.67
Total	365	100.00

Results above show that more than one-quarter or 28.77% of the respondents saw the commercial disruption as favourable to the debate programme audience; more than two-fifths or 43.56% disagreed while less than one-third or 27.67% held no specified opinion. It shows that those who disagreed were more than those who agreed by a difference of 14.79% which is more than one-tenth of the entire respondents. It means that the majority opinion of the respondents did not favour the commercial break as being beneficial to the programme audience.

Item 5 in the opinionaire was used to find how the programme audience reacted to the commercial break in the political debate programme. Obtained data were analyzed as follows:

Table 5: Programme Audience Response to the Presented Commercial Break

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Commercials are not part of the debate	62	16.99
The commercials disrupts candidate information flow	136	37.26
Commercials interfere and confuse the basis for candidate's evaluation	114	31.23
No specific response is enough	53	14.52
Total	365	100.00

Results above show that while those who said that the commercials are foreign to the debate programme were less than one-fifth at 16.99%, those who felt it was a disruption accounted for more than one-third of the respondents or 37.26% while 31.23% or more than one-quarter bemoaned the confusion introduced by the commercial as a basis for candidate consideration by the voter in the election. It means that the majority opinion is that political advertisements as commercials disrupt information flow and confuse the template for candidate evaluation.

Again, item 6 in the study was used to ascertain if the political advertisement affects decision-making on the candidate through its intrusion in the debate programme assessment. Obtained data were analyzed as follows:

Results blow show that 46.57% of the respondents or more than two-fifths agreed that political advertisements within a political debate programme confuse the basis for voter decision while 31.77% or less than one-third disagreed and 21.64% had no specified opinion. It shows that those who agreed were more than those who disagreed by a difference of 14.80% which is more than one-tenth of the total number of respondents. It means that a majority of the respondents believed that political advertisements within the political debate programme confuse the basis for candidates' evaluation and are capable of affecting voter decision.

Table 6: Programme Viewers' Assessment of the Commercial Interruption

Item 6 Political	Response						Total	Mean value $\overline{X}$
advertisements within political debate programme confuse the assessment basis for voter decision-making.	Code	SA=5	A=4	UD=3	D=2	SD=1	15	1179
	Frequency	48	122	79	98	18	365	365
	Code value result	240	488	237	196	18	1179	= 3.23
	Percentage	13.15	33.42	21.64	26.84	4.93	99.98	$\overline{X}$ =3.23

Research Hypotheses

The two formulated hypotheses in the study were tested using items in the opinionaire. The details of conducted tests show the following:

Hypothesis One

H_1: Political debate audience interest is served by political advertisements presented in between the live programme.

H_O: Audience interest is not served by the advertisements between the debateprogramme.

Item 3 in the opinionaire was used for testing the hypothesis above. Details at Table 3 show that X = 2.69 > 3.0. It shows that the calculated mean value of 2.69 was less than the decision point value of 3.0 hence rejecting the alternate hypothesis, H_1, and accepting the null hypotheses, H_O. It means that debate programme audience interest is not served by the political advertisements presented in between the live debate programme.

Research Hypothesis Two

H_1: Voter assessment of candidates is affected by political advertisements in-between live political debate programme.

H_o: Political advertisements in a live political debate programme do not affect voter assessment of candidate.

Item 6 in the opinionaire was used to test the above hypothesis. Also, Table 6 were used for the test. It was seen that political advertisements within political debate programmes confuse the assessment basis for voter-decision-making. The calculated mean value of 3.23 was obtained which is greater than the decision point value of 3.0, hence X = 3.23 > 3.0. It means that the null hypothesis, H_o, above was rejected while its alternate, H_1, was accepted. It shows that the majority opinion is that voter assessment of candidates is affected by political advertisements in-between live political debate programme.

Summary of Findings

The following findings were made in this study:

- Disruption of a live political debate programme with political advertisements is not necessary as a programme strategy.
- The majority of viewers did not endorse the programme style of introducing content foreign to a debate into the programme.
- Audience interest was not served by the commercial disruption of political debate programme by political advertisements.
- Candidate assessment by the voter is affected by political advertisements as content foreign to the political debate content.
- Rationalization is affected where the voter is confused with a mixture of different programme contents presented to be consumed simultaneously by the same viewer.

Discussion of Findings

Political communication provides political content to its audience. It is designed to influence receiver's attitude and behaviour towards a cause (Bitzer, 1989). This view explains why political advertisements are used to create awareness, sensitize content consumers on a presented cause and facilitate opportunity for audience mobilization in order to encourage active participation in suggested approaches. Owuamalam (2017) tells us that programme objective relies on programme strategy to execute a particular programme format so as to use programme style to achieve a goal. It implies that each programme type has a specific objective to be accomplished. In that sense, political advertisement as a programme package differs from a political debate programme (Akpan, 1985). It is the currency of the debate as a live presentation, free from interruption that makes audience assessment of the candidate easier.

The study found that the advertisement disrupts the flow of content needed to aid voter consideration of the candidates. This expected non-interruptivenature of the political debate content made a majority of the respondents believe that the disruption was unnecessary. They however see the intrusion as an economic intervention strategy of stations while not satisfying audience interest. It reveals how economic instinct exploits a largely generated debate programme audience to become exposed to another programme content, different from the debate. The study confirmed that the intrusion does not serve audience interest. A dilemma then occurs as to why programmes are produced and presented for audience consumption.

It is the inability of the received content to be endorsed as being in line with the audience latitude of acceptance that led to the obtained contrast instead of assimilation, hence non-endorsement of the programme style. Here, the social judgement theory explains why a majority did not endorse the programme style but rather believed that an introduced foreign material obliterates rationalization and adversely affects voter consideration of candidate as a decision-making process.

Conclusion

Entropy is generated in the assessment field of the voter where evaluation indices are adulterated with foreign content in a political debate programme like with political advertisement content. Audience interest is key to successful programming in broadcasting and must be respected for a station's viability.

Recommendations

1. Audience interest should receive greater consideration in programme presentation. A programme not endorsed by a majority of the audience is a failure since it lacks mass appeal and acceptance.
2. Television stations should be guided by programme type in designing programme objectives. If the objectives are inconsistent with audience expectation, then the presentation may not achieve its desired goal.
3. There should be a balance between station's financial interest and social responsibility to a station's audience. It is when a station refrains from pecuniary consideration that creativity provides rationalization vital to station survival through extrinsic profits.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study differentiated political advertisement from political debate as a separate and distinct broadcast programme content. The difference in their respective programme content objectives explains how voters access political candidates rationally from a physical evaluation perspective. This study therefore provides a platform for a further study like whether presented political programmes can inhibit voting interest as to enhance voter apathy. This postulation will improve literature in political communication.

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