

Seducing the Voters: The Powerful and Limited Effects of TV Electioneering¹

Lourdes M. Portus

This study focuses on television (TV)'s seduction of selected Metro Manila voters into electing TV personalities. It explores the influence of TV and other factors on the electorate's voting behavior. Citing the senatorial and mayoral elections of May 2001 as cases, the study interviewed 121 households and eight personalities from media and the academe.

Using the Agenda-Setting and Limited Effects theories, the study reveals that TV could have been a powerful tool in shaping voters' behavior. The influencing factors include length of TV exposure and image packaging of candidates. However, there are other qualifications like educational attainment, past accomplishments, and good reputation that voters consider in a candidate. Hence, to emerge victorious in elections, a candidate needs much more than mere presence in TV programs.

The study also indicates that certain personalities deliberately use TV in anticipation of elections. This explains the incessant campaign or electioneering embedded in so-called "service programs", "talk shows", "infomercials", and other TV projects—months before the election season begins. This also affirms the notion that an extended and prolonged TV exposure enhances name-recall in voters—a possible winning edge for politicians.

Rationale and Objectives

This study explores the outcomes of TV electioneering and other factors that make a winner out of an electoral candidate, particularly prior to and during the 2001 elections. It

inquires into whether or not TV could successfully seduce voters into electing TV icons, and whether or not TV has either powerful or limited effects on the outcome of elections. Furthermore, what other factors, if any, actually influence voting behavior?

The country's elections always offer media scholars with the opportunity to scrutinize the powerful agenda-setting function of media, as well as its limited effects. What are the voters' criteria in choosing candidates? Do mass media, particularly TV, affect their choices? What is "TV Electioneering"? What are the factors that contributed to TV electioneering practices as campaign strategies of aspiring politicians?

The national and local elections of May 2001 serve as cases in point. Although the study dates back to 2001, it still offers insights on the 2007 elections, as well as on future political exercises.

Despite Republic Act (RA) No. 6646, a law prohibiting political campaign-related activities 90 days before an election, many privileged politicians vying for positions in 2001 started to use subtle campaign strategies as early as June 2000. Not surprisingly, they used TV to the hilt as a popular campaign tool. For instance, in blatant disregard of RA 6646, TV stations featured Manuel Villar's *Sipag at Tiyaga* commercial, as well as the hosting stints of Solita Monsod for *Debate* and Lito Atienza for *Maynila*.

Similarly, circumventing the law on the campaign period were the TV drama series of actors Rudy Fernandez in *Kasangga* and Philip Salvador in *Verano*. Many "infomercials" followed suit, involving high-profile candidates like Horacio Morales, Antonio Cerilles, and Eduardo Josen.

According to an article by Margaret Scammell in *Media, Culture and Society* (1998), the TV electioneering phenomenon overemphasizes the force of technology like TV. It refers to the use of TV by politicians to conduct their campaigns and entice voters to elect them. Believing in the power of technology, (i.e., TV), candidates made it a popular election tool in the May 2001 elections and will continue to do so in future political exercises.

But, we now ask, were the media really that powerful? How or why did certain personalities lose in the elections despite an exposure to the media similar to that of the winners'? To what extent did other factors like the Church, political party, educational attainment, and familial and regional affinity influence voters?

Research Methods and Sampling Frame

With the help of some colleagues, this researcher conducted the study before the May 2001 elections to find out how selected voters from Manila and Quezon City would be casting their votes and what their primary consideration would be in future voting exercise.

The researchers used both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (focus interview) methods. The survey helped determine the opinion of the respondents, while the focus interviews validated the findings of the survey and probed into the power or influence of TV and certain institutions in Philippine society.

The researchers also used the ideographic process to draw meanings and insights from the opinions and ideas of political analysts, media practitioners, and image-makers. Finally, they pre-tested the research instruments among experienced voters and regular TV viewers.

Using an interview schedule, the researchers conducted a survey among 121 respondents from Manila and Quezon City's upper, middle, and lower classes. They selected the respondents based on certain criteria: a) Area of residence (i.e., either Quezon City or the City of Manila); b) Past voting experience (e.g., 1998 elections); and c) Regular or daily TV viewing habit.

In addition, the researchers interviewed a separate set of eight media practitioners and academicians. Interviewed *after* the survey, experts shared their insights and possible explanations on the processes of TV electioneering as an election campaign phenomenon.

Clearly, the study was *not* a national poll that intended to gauge the opinion of the Filipino electorate.

History of TV Electioneering

To have a better grasp of TV electioneering and its current practice, it is important to outline its historical development in the United States and in the Philippines.

Eisenhower, Nixon, and Stevenson

The first recorded event that used the power of television was the 1952 presidential election that pitted the Republican Party's Dwight Eisenhower against the Democratic Party's Adlai Stevenson. Both candidates used television advertisements.

Eisenhower's advertisement, "I like Ike", consisted of an animated cartoon with music by Irving Berlin. According to many political observers, this ad was aired on national TV in the US and gave Eisenhower an edge.

Furthermore, Eisenhower's vice-presidential running-mate, Richard Nixon, used TV fully as he delivered a live 30-minute speech denying accusations that he got \$18,000 worth of undeclared gifts from rich donors.

The accusations almost ended Nixon's political career with Eisenhower and aides considering dropping him from the vice-presidential race. His speech on TV, however, prompted Republicans to urge Eisenhower to keep Nixon as his running-mate. Moreover, public or open reporting of political candidates' financial histories on live TV began with Nixon's speech.

Kennedy versus Nixon

TV electioneering was also evident in the celebrated Kennedy-Nixon debate in the United States. This event was aired on national TV purposely to enable the American people to form a basis for



Actor Ronald Reagan during his presidential campaign in 1979. Retrieved August 22, 2008 from <http://www.jamd.com/search?assettype=g&assetid=2850340&text=ronald+reagan+campaign>

choosing their president. Both candidates knew the importance of TV exposure and used TV as a campaign tool.

What was the deciding factor then for Kennedy's eventual victory in the elections? According to political analysts, Kennedy's packaging and performance in front of TV cameras made the difference. Kennedy was packaged as a youthful, good-looking, and confident would-be President. In contrast, Nixon appeared as an aging, tired, and weak leader, thus raising questions about his ability to govern a demanding nation.

Reagan and Clinton

The power of media likewise surfaced in the case of Ronald Reagan. According to Zoonen (1998: 190), Reagan was an "embodiment of an inseparable link between media and politics." He was a movie star before he ran for president, with the American public knowing

him as a film icon. Not surprisingly, this Hollywood-packaged candidate succeeded as a two-term President of the United States of America.

The Reagan and William Clinton contest for the presidency saw the intensive use of TV. Political analysts observed that the two candidates had mastered the art of TV campaigning and that their campaigns were not a fight between candidates who used TV and who did not. It was rather a test of the ability of their political strategists and media practitioners to effectively package their clients-candidates.

Clinton versus Bush

In the Clinton-Bush contest, the handsome and youthful Clinton had the edge over the elderly Bush. Although Bush also used TV, it did not guarantee victory for him. The media's power was *not* limitless, after all. There were other factors, apart from TV exposure, that made a candidate a winner in elections.

Of the US presidential candidates, political observers noted that Bush lost because: a) Winners were those who dressed well and looked good on TV; they were packaged well for the voting public; b) Winners were confident-looking, hopeful and projected themselves as leaders, and c) Losers were those who appeared nervous, elderly, tense and glum (Zoonen, 1998).

Quirino versus Magsaysay

In the Philippines, TV had its debut in the late 1940s. Due to the war that destroyed local communications infrastructure and facilities, TV had to wait a while before being recognized as a tool for political campaigns.

Starting in the 1950s, people saw TV being used as a campaign tool. Incumbent President Elpidio Quirino, sickly and unable to launch a national campaign, resorted to using TV in his re-election bid. Implementing a nationwide campaign was possible

for him, since his family owned radio and television stations then. Nonetheless, despite his use of TV, he lost to Ramon Magsaysay (Del Mundo, 1986).

Inferring from the experience of US presidential candidates cited earlier, the “poor packaging” of Quirino would explain his loss in the elections despite his available resources, political connections and ownership and control of a media organization. He was sickly and, like Nixon and Bush, looked worn out and incapable of running the country.

In contrast, Magsaysay appeared energetic and close to the masses. This earned him such endearments as “The Guy” and “Champion of the common *tao*”. While Quirino invaded the electronic media, Magsaysay combed the rural areas and shook people’s hands.

That particular presidential election proved that TV is not that powerful compared to a candidate’s personal touch through face-to-face communication, coupled with tireless visits in the provinces. It showed that there are other factors other than TV electioneering that could make or break a candidate.

However, it is to be noted that, during those times, TV ownership was limited or accessible to a relatively small number of “rich” homes. TV sets were expensive and beyond the reach of the poor who constituted the majority of voters. There were only about 500 TV sets in the entire country then. As Del Mundo noted, “The country was not yet ready for the new medium” (1986: 74).

Nacionalista Party versus Liberal Party

During the 1960s and the 1970s, the strength of political parties, particularly the administration or ruling party, determined the outcome of elections. The two-party system consisted mainly of the Nacionalista Party (NP) and the Liberal Party (LP) which took turns in propelling their candidates to powerful positions. The party machinery was the key to the outcome of elections. Significantly,

independent candidates had the slimmest chance to emerge as winner in an election.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw Ferdinand Marcos exercise rigid control over mass media. Newspapers, radio, and television became mouthpieces of the totalitarian government. Consequently, the mass media faltered in their function as critic of the Marcos administration. Censorship was at its peak. It was imperative for an aspiring candidate to belong to the administration's political party in order to get elected.

1986 EDSA revolution and post-EDSA

Changes in the electoral process occurred after the 1986 EDSA Revolution. In 1988, RA 6646 introduced reforms in the electoral system, including the ad ban. However, this law had many loopholes and was subject to numerous misinterpretations.

In the elections of the 1990s, some politicians circumvented this law by appearing on TV. The distinctions between “sharing or providing information” and “campaigning by using a TV program or show” became blurred. Many politicians started or continued to appear in both TV commercials and regular programs.

Likewise, some media practitioners who became popular decided—with a little prodding—to seek political office. In the 1998 elections, TV personalities Loren Legarda (*Inside Story*), Renato Cayetano (*Compañero y Compañera*), and Vicente Sotto (*Eat Bulaga* and *Brigada Siyete*) topped the senatorial race.

Their sharp rise to political power became a model (and inspiration) for some political wannabes who likewise started to invade TV, hoping to boost their popularity. TV programs, where candidates would inevitably appear, became the voters' basis for decision-making. The media's agenda-setting function became more evident as TV-exposure increased one's chances of winning in an election.

Present-day politicians

Starting in 1999 up to the present, a new twist in political campaign activities became apparent, especially in the proliferation of infomercials. In the guise of public service, public information permeated TV programs. Villar, Morales, Joso, Cerilles, and others, at one time or another, all appeared in TV commercials. Both the survey respondents and interviewees who were TV viewers perceived this as a form of political campaign rather than a simple information service to the public. Buying TV program airtime for electioneering (*Sabayán, Tonight with Lorna, Tropang Pinoy*, etc.) became a common practice among politicians and neophyte candidates. *Katapat* of Mayor Lim, *Verano* of Philip Salvador, *Kasangga* of Rudy Fernandez, *Maynila* of Lito Atienza, *Pira-pirasong Pangarap* of Gina de Venecia, *Kontak 5* are all good examples.

Survey Findings

Profile of respondents

The survey involves 121 respondents from the upper, middle, and lower classes of Manila and Quezon City. It also identifies their social location, particularly their age, gender, civil status, religion and educational attainment.

A majority (71.1%) of the respondents belong to the relatively younger population (20 to 40-year old bracket) of Manila and Quezon City. This implies that they probably belong to the electronic and information age, with high exposure to mass media and technological advances.

Majority of the respondents are female (60.3%), single (47.1%) and married (47.9%). A great majority are Catholics (75.2%).

More than half of the respondents are college graduates or have at least reached college level (69.4%). This attests to the fact that the study's respondents are literate and educated.

The greatest number (22.3%) of the respondents are professionals, followed by students (19%), clerical/manual workers (14.9%), businessmen/women (14.9%), unemployed (14%), and housewives (5%). By inference, the respondents possess a certain level of maturity and professionalism, which has implications on their judgment of the topic under study, as they can be critical and give relevant views regarding politics.

TV and voting behavior

The following are the data on the image-building capabilities of TV and the voting behavior of the electorate prior to the elections.

TV as image builder

The survey reveals the belief among respondents (81.8%) that politicians who appear on TV have better chances of being elected. This resonates with the popular notion that a candidate's exposure to TV translates to a powerful campaign strategy.

The respondents, who think appearing on TV is an advantage, have noted that this is due to: better name-recall, popularity, and media's influence on majority of the voting populace.

Almost half of the respondents (47.9%) regard TV electioneering as acceptable because TV is the most effective and accessible medium of information. It also familiarizes the viewers about the political candidates.

The respondents were divided on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of television use, depending on factors like: a) equal opportunity and exposure should be afforded all candidates regardless of economic status or access to a political machinery; b) TV should be used to inform and educate the public rather than

promote personalities; and c) TV should communicate truth instead of functioning as a mouthpiece of government or politicians.

Due to the agenda-setting power of TV programs, many politicians and government officials resorted to maintaining TV programs or appearing on TV regularly. In fact, the survey reveals that 93.4% of the respondents observed the presence of government officials on TV. There was a growing awareness among the respondents of the proliferation of TV programs that feature government officials or politicians. Such TV programs are usually in the form of commercials, sitcoms, dramas, or talk shows.

The top five politicians whom the respondents often saw on TV were Alfredo Lim, Loren Legarda, Manny Villar, Tito Sotto, and former President Joseph Estrada. Except for Estrada and Villar, the rest of the politicians were often seen on TV because of the popularity of their particular TV programs: *Katapat* for Lim (53%), *Loren* (47%) and *Inside Story* for Legarda, and *Brigada Siete* for Sotto (38%). Estrada was often seen on TV news (38%), while Villar was highly visible in his *ST (Sipag at Tiyaga)* infomercial.



Senator Manuel Villar in a scene from his *Sipag at Tiyaga* commercial. Retrieved August 20, 2008 from <http://www.senate.gov.ph/search.aspx%3Fq%3Dbulacan&h=76&w=110&sz=31&hl=en&start=5&um=1&tbnid=F6TJBQAA74swKM:&tbnh=59&tbnw=85&prev=images%3Fq%3Dsipag%2Bat%2Btiyaga%2Bcommercial%2Bof%2Bmanuel%2Bvillar%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG>

Meanwhile, GMA 7 informants in focus interviews claimed that they were not in the business of helping politicians by giving them airtime and creating TV programs for them. It was simply a coincidence that actors Fernandez and Salvador, as well as TV host Lim were politicians. The more significant fact was that their presence improved GMA 7's ratings.

The informants denied the allegation that there was a collusion between media companies and politicians, saying that the choice of stars or hosts depended on an impartial and non-partisan selection process. It starts with proponents who came to them with program concepts. A station committee then assesses and recommends the best concept or program for adoption or rejection.

The informants admitted, however, that the station owners' friends, including prospective politicians, sometimes had an edge over other aspirants.

Reasons for TV appearance

The survey respondents knew why government officials and politicians would want to appear on TV. They cited the following reasons: 1) to build their image (85%); 2) to campaign (75%); 3) to run in the next election (70%); 4) to inform the public (48%); 5) to provide public service (47%); and 6) to spend the public's money (28%).

The first three reasons indicate that the respondents regard electioneering as the politicians' motive for appearing on TV. These also reinforce the notion that TV helps advance one's political career and that it is a convenient tool to wage a long-term campaign while bypassing the ban on political advertisements during elections. Conversely, these imply that respondents do not believe that politicians or government officials are on TV to perform their official functions, supposedly "in the interest of public service".

Whom to vote for, with what criteria

Asked whom they would choose in the 2001 elections, majority (68.5%) of the respondents said that they would vote for Legarda, should she opt to run. The other four politicians who obtained the nod of the respondents were Noli de Castro (45.4%), Dong Puno (45.4%), Connie Angeles (42.1%), and Manny Villar (36.3%)—all with ongoing programs and commercials on TV from 2000 to 2007.

Despite the fact that most of them were regularly seen on TV programs or “infomercials”, almost all or a large majority of the respondents said that they would not vote for Jose Almeida (93.3%), Mike Velarde (90.9%), Ed Josen (90.0%), Anjo Yllana (90.0%), Eddie Villanueva (89.2%), Philip Salvador (88.4%), Bongbong Marcos (87.6%), Susie Mercado (86.7%), and Lorna Verano-Yap (83.3%).

It would seem that the respondents showed a high level of maturity when they enumerated the criteria that are normally regarded as positive qualifications of a political candidate. The data show that the voters had other considerations besides TV exposure in electing candidates. The top three criteria used were: a) Education; b) Past Accomplishments; and c) Integrity or Good Reputation.

On the other hand, the respondents as voters, did not wish to use the following as bases for choosing a candidate: a) Endorsement by the government (95%); b) Endorsement by a provincemate (92.5%); c) Endorsement by business (90%); d) Party affiliation (88.4%); e) Friendship (87.6%); f) Endorsement by the Church (86.7%); and g) Media Exposure (86.7%). It is significant to note that exposure to media was given the lowest rank as a criterion for choosing a candidate. This negates the common belief that being a TV personality assures one of victory in an election. This further confirms the Limited Effects Theory of mass media.

The findings seem to point to the fact that there is a weakening of social institutions. It was revealed that even

endorsement of the powerful Catholic Church would not have an effect on the outcome of election. The respondents regard education, integrity and accomplishment of projects as their bases for decision making. Moreover, it would seem that the respondents show a level of maturity by considering certain qualifications of a political candidate.

Senatorial elections

Majority (67%) of the respondents said that, in the previous senatorial elections (1998), they had voted for Legarda (46.2%) and Cayetano (42.9%) with a significant number of votes. On the contrary, a great majority of the respondents did not vote for Ramon Revilla (78.5%), Estrada (73.5%), and Robert Jaworski (71.9%).

Legarda's qualifications reflect her popularity, rather than her ability to craft laws. Her background consists of her broadcasting skills rather than her expertise in political science, lawmaking or public administration. Hence, Legarda's "number one" position in the 1998 senatorial polls was perceived as the result of her long TV exposure both as newscaster of *The World Tonight*, which aired daily, and as host of *Inside Story* and *Loren*, which aired weekly.

The same can be said of Tito Sotto who topped the 1992 senatorial election. Sotto had been very visible in comedy films and gag shows on TV. He was a member of a trio of comedians who gained notoriety for delivering lewd jokes and toilet humor.

In the 2001 senatorial election, it was Noli de Castro, another media personality, who made it to the top position. He anchored the popular and leading daily primetime news program *TV Patrol*. He became a household byword and, for almost two decades, was a part of the Filipinos' TV fare. And while being an incumbent senator, he hosted *Magandang Gabi, Bayan*, a weekend program.

Thus, all the three topnotchers in the 1992, 1998, and 2001 senatorial elections were TV personalities. In 2004, the topnotcher

was Mar Roxas, who was not a TV personality. However, political analysts believe that his romantic association with a TV personality, Korina Sanchez, helped a great deal in obtaining the top spot in the list of elected senators. His TV advertisement, *Mr. Palengke*, embellished by the popular jingle, *Mr. Suave*, filled the primetime TV slots and produced a strong name-recall among the voters (Ramiro 2007).

In 2007, it was again Loren Legarda who gained the highest number

of votes among senatorial candidates. Apart from her stint in the senate, Legarda never ceased appearing on TV with her weekly *Real Stories* and *Tara, Tena* programs.

Manila's mayoral elections

Meanwhile, the majority of Manila respondents said that they would vote for Lim as mayor in the 2001 elections, with Imelda Marcos and Lito Atienza as their second and third choices, respectively. The popularity of Lim might have been Channel 2's reason for airing his regular program *Katapat* where he was packaged as a crime-buster and protector of victims of injustice.



Senator Mar Roxas and TV host Korina Sanchez in the July 2004 cover of *People* magazine. Retrieved August 21, 2008 from http://markorinanews.blogspot.com/2004_07_01_archive.html

Surprisingly, however, Lim would eventually lose to Atienza in the May 2004 elections. His unexpected loss could be explained by the following factors:

- a) Lim was associated with former President Estrada as his secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG). The EDSA 2 event of January 2001 that removed Estrada from office preceded the May 2001 elections. Hence, voters still had fresh memories of events leading to Estrada's ouster.
- b) Although Lim had decided to withdraw support from the Estrada Administration during the EDSA revolt, many people regarded him as a "Johnny-come-lately". They branded him an "opportunist" and "disloyal", character types that Filipinos in general despise. His act of "abandoning" the former president sent him to the blacklist of *balimbings* (turncoats) in Philippine politics.
- c) Lim's unorthodox practice of spray-painting the houses of suspected drug lords and pushers was generally considered a violation of human rights.

However, in the recent 2007 mayoral elections in Manila, Lim regained his post as mayor, defeating Councilor Ali Atienza, the son of his political rival. Councilor Atienza proved to be a neophyte in the face of Lim's extensive political experience.

Quezon City's mayoral elections

In Quezon City, the respondents ranked Sonny Belmonte, "first", and Connie Angeles, "second", among the potential mayoral candidates.

It is ironic that another TV icon, Rudy Fernandez, a movie actor appeared in a regular weekly program *Kasangga* should turn out in the survey, and in the actual election results, as one of the

last choices despite his regular and intensive TV exposure. It seems that voters placed less weight to his handsome image on TV than to his generally perceived lack of qualifications for the position of mayor of Quezon City. It is no wonder then that he should lose the mayoral contest to Belmonte.

Other determinants for voting behavior

The survey reveals that, across all income groups—regardless of age, sex, civil status, education, and occupation—majority of the respondents would likely vote for Legarda or Cayetano. Meanwhile, the low-income class voters would likely vote for Joseph Estrada, Ramon Revilla, and Robert Jaworski. Estrada and Revilla were movie icons and portrayed pro-masa characters, while Jaworski was a popular basketball player.

Similarly, across all income groups, the respondents gave Legarda the best performance rating, followed by Lim and Cayetano. In justifying the ratings, the respondents explained that Legarda had “accomplished a lot”; that Lim was an “effective law enforcer” when he was the an director of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) and (later) Manila Mayor; and that Cayetano was a “no-nonsense, brilliant lawyer” (as prominently portrayed) in his TV program, *Compañero y Compañera*.

On the other hand, the same respondents who had given Legarda the “best performance” rating now gave Estrada the “worst performance” rating along with Revilla and Jaworski. The respondents criticized Estrada for his “poor performance” and “indecisiveness”; Jaworski for his being “image-conscious”, and Revilla for “absenteeism” in the Senate sessions.

The poor performance of former President Estrada had, apparently, produced in the upper and middle classes a great deal of “disaffection” and “dissatisfaction”. It is significant to note that voters from these income classes placed a premium on the candidates’ positive qualifications, such as educational attainment, past accomplishments and good reputation.

Also, on the issue of performance, the respondents from the groups of professionals, industrialists, and women gave Lim a higher rating than Legarda. This implies a certain degree of satisfaction with and confidence in Lim as a former DILG secretary. It could also be inferred that these groups actually regard him as a “protector”. Significantly, they gave Revilla and Jaworski a “poor performance” rating.

Meanwhile, Manila respondents belonging to the low income class said that they would vote Imelda Marcos for Mayor, should she decide to run. The upper and middle classes, said, however, that they would cast their votes for Alfredo Lim.

Focus Interview Results

The following data reveal the power of TV electioneering and its limiting factors in ensuring an electoral candidate’s victory .

TV’s range and power

An associate editor and producer for a TV evening news program said that TV’s effectiveness lies in the fact that it can reach numerous communities. TV can present all the issues that affect candidates so that voters could have a good grasp of the issues and the bases for choosing candidates. Nowadays, TV has replaced radio as the more ubiquitous medium since even poor households have TV sets.

Another TV reporter said that TV disseminates all kinds of information, not only election-related ones. Some candidates use TV as a “mouthpiece”, without considering the ethical issues involved. Thus, TV is easily abused since there is no effective regulation on its use. The ad ban is circumvented at the expense of public service. Infomercials take the place of political ads, since some aspirants buy airtime and certain interested sectors sponsor these commercials.

A TV newscaster/producer said that the effect of TV might be seen at three levels: “before, during and after elections.” In all these levels, TV can help ensure honesty in elections and compliance with regulations. Its watchdog and fiscalizing functions could expose anomalies or unethical practices of candidates and/or current politicians.

He added that TV is also active in setting the public agenda through talk shows and public affairs programs. TV producers determine what to talk about and how it should be talked about.

Finally, he said that the lifting of the political ad ban would benefit the rich and the nationally elected officials because it would remove the limits to TV electioneering.

Regulation and the political ad ban

A TV associate editor/producer felt that the use of TV as a medium for political campaign should be regulated. Otherwise, candidates with money for TV electioneering would have a greater chance of winning than candidates with poor resources. This is so because they would have better TV mileage and exposure and would likely win the elections.

He cited moneyed personalities like Renato Cayetano, Orlando Mercado, Franklin Drilon, and Manuel Villar who began campaigning early (i.e., before the start of the 90-day election campaign) to promote their candidacies.

In addition, the interviewee said that the more or the most popular candidate would win. For example, due to his regular long-running TV programs, Noli de Castro’s popularity made him a sure winner. Similarly, a candidate with ample resources can have a TV program by buying airtime and getting sponsors, since there is no regulation on this matter.

Performance, fraud, and TV packaging

The study discovers that the major factor for winning in the elections is performance. However, electoral fraud like *dagdag-bawas* (vote shaving and padding) can spell defeat for a candidate.

A columnist and radio broadcaster views TV as a major factor in winning an election, but he says that the “packaging” factor is more significant. Wasn’t John Kennedy a “youthful” candidate who won against the much “older” Nixon?

He adds that TV eventually stifles the viewers’ thinking process and intensifies their passive absorption of whatever trash TV pours out. This may be a big boost to the winning chances of less qualified candidates who use TV to hypnotize and seduce the voters. Thus, TV may enable “weak” candidates, who may not have anything worthwhile in their heads or hearts, to win the votes of non-critical viewers.

The study’s respondents may have different opinions about media. However, they expressed that although TV may play a very important role in elections, it is ultimately not the decisive factor for a candidate’s victory. They asserted that it can produce a desired or intended outcome in an election only for as long as there is “proper packaging” (i.e., the use of image, message and language of the medium) as to the simplistic notion that TV “makes or breaks” a candidate.

None of the interviewees believe in the “absolute” effectiveness of TV. They also recognize TV’s key role in the making or unmaking of candidates.

What gives TV an edge over other media is the fact that it is more direct, and its impact on the audience’s psyche is more enduring due to its audio-visual nature. It greatly reduces the inherent risks that candidates may encounter in face-to-face campaign sorties. Furthermore, TV’s impact assures candidates that voters would remember them for some time. Thus, with these beliefs, political candidates regard TV as an excellent tool for increasing their chances of winning.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Contrary to popular opinion, TV exposure is not a guarantee in winning elections. Numerous candidates have actually lost in their political bids despite the extensive use of TV.
2. TV may be regarded as the best tool in political campaigns, but it can only be effective, if and when accompanied by other factors, such as long exposure, proper packaging, educational attainment, past accomplishments, and good reputation.
3. Lessons from the US electoral experience on TV electioneering should be invoked. Admittedly, it is important to appear on TV, but one should look good and sound good to convince voters that he or she is a credible leader. Perhaps, a serious candidate should hire TV consultants for proper packaging.
4. Some politicians may attempt to manipulate election results through vote-buying or *dagdag-barwas schemes*. This is the arena or forum where government and media should cooperate and play their particular roles: as a watchdog for the latter, and election-law enforcer for the former.
5. There should be a law against elected officials hosting TV and/or radio programs. Instead, they should concentrate on their legislative or executive functions and hire professional media practitioners to manage their particular TV programs. The more prominent cases in point include Legarda's *Katapat*, De Castro's *Magandang Gabi, Bayan* and Atienza's *Maynila*.
6. Social institutions, such as church, school and political party, do not seem significant enough in influencing voters. For instance, there doesn't appear to be a "Catholic vote" or Catholics voting as a bloc.
7. Unlike previous decades, particularly the Marcos years, the political party machinery seems to be losing its clout. Retail politics or the individual politician's packaging has become more popular.

8. This researcher/writer agrees with the respondents' recommendation to restore the ban on political advertisements to equalize opportunities among the candidates. Otherwise, its absence during elections would only favor the richer ones among the lot. Furthermore, political ad ban's restoration may help reduce the possible collusion between rich politicians and media owners.
9. Increasing the media owners' income or profit is not necessarily objectionable *per se*, but it should not be the only benefit in mind.
10. Computerization of the election system and procedures could help reduce election frauds, particularly the practice of *dagdag-barwas*.
11. Voters' education is critical. Voters should rely more on rational and logical deliberation of issues than on TV infomercials and entertainment.
12. Mass media should practice the profession with ethical considerations, rather than focusing merely on financial or commercial goals.
13. Media councils should cooperate in checking the excesses and abuses of the mass media.
14. The state should protect the people from the abuses of the media by regulating the use of government funds for politically motivated TV ads and programs and by strictly enforcing the political ad ban.

All of the foregoing conclusions and recommendations are easier said than done, however. Ultimately, the masses should be vigilant and critical of what media and government do. Society can best serve this function when it is properly informed. In this regard, media and government should assume the all-important task of providing the necessary information to the public.

Note

- ¹ This paper was based on a study conducted by the author, Veronica Isla, and Beyan Atta as a requirement in Communication 323, a doctoral course in the College of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City, Second Semester, SY 2000-2001.

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Lourdes M. Portus is an associate professor at the Department of Communication Research of the University of the Philippines College of Mass Communication in Diliman.