



## PICTORIAL IMPACT OF TELEVISION POLITICAL ADVERTISING ON VOTERS IN A MULTI-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

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### ABSTRACT

*This work examines the opinion of politically conscious viewers on the pictorial power of television political campaigns of the 2011 elections. The reason was to find out if television pictures can communicate and add information to political messages, causing viewers to react according to the source's intention. The survey research method was adopted. The main instrument applied in the study was the questionnaire administered on 250 politically conscious viewers who also voted in Uyo metropolis. Some research questions were formulated and problem statement made to realize the objectives of this work. It was realized that television political campaign pictures of the 2011 elections did not have any significant impact on politically conscious viewers. Moreover, viewers were not deterred from one party to another because of campaign pictures. They adopted the "continuance" action. It was also discovered that pictures add dimensions to political campaign messages, apart from being communicative. It was therefore recommended that television campaign pictures should appear real to either deter or reinforce viewer's beliefs.*

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**Keywords:** The major and important concepts in this work include the following: Aesthetics, Advertisement, Continuance, Discontinuance, Multi-cultural, Pictorial impact, Political advertising, Political consciousness, Voters.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A picture, it is said, is worth a thousand words. Pictures are devoted evidence of reality. They tell, or are supposed to tell stories more than words. If well-arranged they can give more information and can even mobilise without or with limited audio support. However, since television is an audio-video medium, it is pertinent to combine both picture and sound for the clarification, intensification and interpretation of audience experience. However, Udosen (1990) has the view that "three words are worth A Thousand Pictures".

Pictures can create effect and impact on television viewers. They are important in information dissemination and audience mobilisation, and can cause people to act or not act depending on the point of view of the message they carry. Therefore, pictures deserve serious attention since they carry vital information. No matter how pictures are manipulated, the viewer believes in what he sees on the screen because that represents true experience.

Pictures are mirrors with memories. Rich information can be found in pictures. They illustrate attitudes and emotions of people towards the subjects and events portrayed. It is obvious that pictures appeal to the visual sense. They help in remembering and recall. They add dimension to information and create impact on viewers.

The discourse considers the fact that political advertising video, like photographs have crucial meaning. They add depth to words. In television they are used to amplify and extend the image of the photographed subject or confer status on an event. It is a witness that depicts existence.

The impact of pictures are measured in their ability to convert vision into form and bring about change. It could also be measured in their ability to convey meaningful, communicative and persuasive information.

Most television programmes attract viewership, not only because of their entertainment and other values, but also because of their visual quality. To this end, UNESCO (1980) agrees that they frequently reach high quality aesthetic value, apart from having socio-political influences.

Pictures offer a concise and easily understood story. They are being praised for their semantic, artistic or instructional quality, their satirical exposure of modern life as well as their didactic quality. Idiong (1990) emphasizes this by stating that the use of pictures or graphic materials to establish comprehension is integral to learning. Also on the power of pictures, Mboho (1990) says that a picture speaks a universal language.

Nevertheless, they are also criticised because they convey several meanings which are only in the intention of the creator. This could result in conflict and duality of interpretation and misinterpretation of communication intent.

Television pictures are like any other pictures, subject to the conventional aesthetic rules of picture composition. Their communicative power depends on their quality and aesthetic appeal. Seeing, it is said, is believing.

### 1.1. Definition of Operational Terms

It is important to explain the following terms as used in this work. They are:

**Aesthetics:** This is the aspect of communication presentation that creates feelings in viewers. It results from a good combination of picture, sound, space, time and other related elements.

**Gestalt:** It is the outcome of good picture and sound combination as well as good picture – picture transition.

**Impact:** This is the influence and effect created in viewers after exposure to certain phenomena.

**Picture:** This refers to all visual elements that appear on the television screen and relating to political advertising.

**Sound:** This refers to any vibration that has a purpose in, and which contributes to, television political advertising.

**Synergy:** This is a good combination of sound and picture as well as a good transition from picture to picture.

**Television Political Campaign:** Political advertising produced for, and shown on, television.

**Voting Behaviour:** The tendency to vote or not, the decision on whom to vote for as well as the pattern of voting.

## 1.2. Nigeria as a Multicultural Environment

Nigeria is held as a country with unity in diversity. This stems from the fact that though the country is multiethnic and multicultural and even multilingual in nature, it still remains one, or pretends to be one. This variegated identity and nature of Nigeria carries with it diverse cultures which invariably affect our political leanings. Nigeria is also divided along regional lines which also affects political affiliation in a way.

In the 2011 elections in Nigeria, political affiliation was revealed as follows:

- (i) In the south-south, part of the South East, Middle Belt, and part of the North, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) took the upper hand.
- (ii) The South East also had great affinity to the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA).
- (iii) Part of the North also had the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), while;
- (iv) The South-West was loyal to the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN).
- (v) The All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) was partly northern and partly nowhere.

The above stated viewpoints show that apart from ethnic affiliation, political campaigns followed ethnic, cultural and regional lines. The south-west in particular actually showed full loyalty to the ACN.

Party affiliation in Nigeria has never been very national in outlook. This means that in a multicultural state like Nigeria, party affiliation follows cultural and regional lines.

The culture and ethnic affinity determines to a large extent party loyalty in the Nigerian state. Though opposition is a healthy development for checks and balances, no party in Nigeria is totally national in outlook, except the PDP to an extent.

Political advertising therefore follows the line of ethnic and cultural affiliations of the parties concerned.

At least three political parties have gone into affiliation and alliance to synergise properly in order to counter the supposed might of the PDP in the 2015 polls. These parties, which include ACN, CPC, ANPP, and a faction of APGA, have been registered under the new name of All Progressive Congress (APC). This alliance materialized into a political party in August 2013 with the hope of posing a great challenge to the ruling party in 2015. By the end of August and the beginning of September 2013, the PDP experienced a crisis instigated by a former Vice President and some governors loyal to him and who were aggrieved with the party. Efforts were being made to resolve the crisis which came to the fore at the PDP congress in Abuja, Nigeria. This comes in the hills of accusations and counter accusations trailing the political and security situations in the country. The affiliated parties believe that their synergy could upturn the situation and cause a power shift in the country. In any case, politics in Nigeria has taken a significant dimension and

citizens are becoming more aware of their political responsibilities. However, several Nigerians are totally detribalized and politics and its campaign simply are means of exercising one's franchise, as far as they are concerned.

### 1.3. Political Advertising

Political advertising is a marketing process. It is a marketing function that puts across the objectives of political candidates and their parties to the society or public. However, the notion that political advertising is just another marketing function much like advertising for toothpaste, food items and other essential commodities, has elicited some controversies in recent times. The difference lies in the following:

- The product is a person or a philosophy rather than an item for sale or service.
- The period for a political advertising campaign is often finite rather than ongoing.
- The ethical question is larger due to misleading advertising claims.

Political advertising is also a forum in which federal, state and local politicians use media campaigns to influence voters. By so doing, registered voters become more aware of the candidates' record and stand on issues. Political visions can also be spread through this forum. Political candidates can also use advertising to discredit their opponents.

Some politicians spend a lot of money on advertising to influence a lot of voters. They enlist top talents from the world of commercial advertising and show business to execute their advertising campaigns. They may, run some ads with positive messages initially to build goodwill with voters, then follow up with ads that sling mud at opposing candidates. The media used are both electronic and print.

In reaction to the campaign picture portrait of Architect Ekong Etuk against his less presentable pictures in the 1997 political campaigns in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria, Late Obong Akpan Isemin remarked that "politics is not a beauty contest". This was interpreted to mean that no matter how flamboyant the political campaign picture is, the voters would react according to the principles of their mandate and the philosophies of the candidates and their parties. Sometimes, and it could be most of the time, it follows ethnic and cultural leanings. Here too, the quality of the picture may have no role to play.

### 1.4. Negative Political Advertising

There has been an ethical dilemma in political advertising in which case the "Nays" have it. In several cases in Nigeria, politics has been a brutish affair with candidates leveling outrageous accusations against one another. These attacks have been brought to our different homes through contemporary electronic media that offer immediacy to such campaigns. When politicians malign each other, radio and television flash the news from coast to coast. This means that the media are also involved in providing the arena for negative political advertising, as they do for positive ones.

In Nigeria, negative political ads took the centre stage during campaigns for the occupation of top offices at the national and state levels in the 2011 elections.

Surprisingly, however, some studies have shown that negative political ads do not totally work, and sometimes make the electorates even more cynical about the political process. A study

carried out by some scholars in 1989 concluded that, “voters’ overall responses are more positive for sponsor-positive advertisement than for sponsor-positive/opponent-Negative or opponent-Negative political advertisement”. The same study also indicated that negative ad is effective when an unknown challenger uses it against a well-known incumbent.

Most political consultants believe that negative political ad will be rampant in future as there are no restraints or restrictions or regulations to prevent candidates from running even the most hostile attacks. People are hardly disciplined for violating the code of ethics of political communication. Politicians believe that if you do not use this powerful weapon you will lose it, and others will use it on you.

Paradoxically, candidates who use negative ad to prove they are worthy of governing us, often end up proving otherwise. They seem to care more about winning than about ethics. It should however, be noted that negative ad harms both candidates and destroys their credibility as voters so often feel they are choosing the “lesser of two evils.”

However, politicians and voters alike should realise that elections are too important to be decided by negative advertising. Both have the powers to influence the course of history. This is why their ads should be taken to the highest ethical standard.

### **1.5. Statement of the Problem**

Political campaigns and voting have continued to be media issues and subsequently attract attention of voters to candidates and parties. Media impact on political campaigns therefore becomes pertinent in a study that relates especially to television images shown during political campaigns. Television is supposed to and should energise the audience into engaging with the presentation to the extent that they respond with adequate feedback. However, some television pictures are neither properly harnessed to synergise with sound, nor are they arranged to follow the principles of montage. Moreover, some television campaign pictures are not communicative enough to appeal to the audience, apart from not meeting their visual objectives. As a result they do not spur viewers to action.

The pictures, which constitute the television video are expected to create some kinds of impression on viewers and cause them to act as expected by the source. This means that the viewers are expected to be persuaded towards the source’s desired goals. Television political campaigns are expected to be very persuasive because of the pictures which are supposed to create an added effect in the portrayed messages. Moreover, since a picture is said to be worth a thousand words, its communicative value should be more than what any sound could carry, even if combined. The point of this article is to seek to know if, in the opinion of the electorate, television campaign pictures have any influence on party selection or affiliation and the voting behaviour of viewers. What impact, therefore, do pictures accompanying political campaign advertisement have on the politically conscious viewers?

### **1.6. Research Questions**

The questions that are pertinent to this study are as follows:

- (1) Do television political campaigns pictures have any impact on viewers?

- (2) Do pictures in television political campaigns help to determine voters' behaviour?
- (3) To what extent are television political campaign pictures communicative in a multicultural environment?
- (4) Do pictures add dimension to television political campaign messages?
- (5) To what extent does the multicultural nature of the Nigerian state affect the outcome of television political campaigns?
- (6) What categories of action do television political campaign pictures elicit in viewers?

### 1.7. Theoretical Framework

The Agenda Setting, Social Categories and Social Relationship theories guided this work.

### 1.8. The Agenda Setting Theory

The theory stipulates that the mass media by defining the political issues and the amount of attention given to a specific topic create the agenda for public discussion. The theory, which was propounded by [McCombs and Shaw \(1972\)](#) assumes that a direct positive relationship exists between media coverage and the salience of the topic in the public's mind. This means that the media structure what is important by conferring status on it. In their comments [Anaeto et al. \(2008\)](#) say that the theory proposes that the facts which people know about public issues tend to be those which the mass media present to them. Here it is believed that the more a political candidate is exposed through television political campaign, the better, or worse, his chances are in the public's mind. This is because his picture may create either a positive or negative impact on the people.

### 1.9. Social Categories Theory

The premise of this theory, made possible by [Melvin and Ball-Rokeach \(1975\)](#), is that people who have similar characteristics namely age, gender, educational attainment, political affiliation or urban residence will also have similar folkways in spite of the heterogeneity of the modern society. It is assumed that similar modes of orientation and behaviour may relate them to such phenomenon as the mass media in similar ways.

### 1.10. Social Relationship Theory

This is an explication of the social categories theory. It was also propounded by [Melvin and Ball-Rokeach \(1975\)](#). The theory states that in a formal society, relationships mediate in a manner in which a given individual will act upon a communication message that comes to his or her attention through the mass media.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study used the survey research method with the questionnaire as the instrument. According to [Awak \(2013\)](#) "surveys enable the researcher to obtain data about practices, situations or views at one point in time through questionnaires or interviews". The method was considered necessary as the study required the personal opinion, ideas and perception of respondents. A sample of 250 voters was selected through the purposive sampling procedure in Uyo municipality

in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Only candidates who were politically conscious and enlightened, and who were 18 years and above, were selected and used as respondents. Respondents were also selected on the basis of their knowledge of the issue under consideration. Their exposure to television political advertisement and participation in the election were other necessary criteria. The method is also regarded by [Wimmer and Joseph \(2006\)](#) as that which requires careful planning and execution, and taking a wide variety of decisions and problems into account.

### 2.1. Instrumentation

A 14-item questionnaire was used in gathering data for the study. It was distributed to 250 respondents. The questionnaire contained a few demographic variables and more on exposure to television political campaigns. This was simple enough for respondents to understand and fill. They were also asked if the candidate's picture rather than political and other relationships could determine their responses in exercising their franchise. The questions were mostly close-ended while only one sought their opinion.

### 2.2. Categories of Action

There are certain degrees of action that could be taken by recipients after being exposed to persuasive communication. These include Adoption, Continuance, Discontinuance and Deterrence.

Adoption means using a new method after leaving the first. Continuance is the act of continuing with an already existing practice. It means maintaining affiliation with an adopted candidate. Deterrence has to do with using a method to discourage someone. A picture could be used to deter or encourage someone. Lastly, Discontinuance means leaving a former practice following dissatisfaction and disaffection. One discontinues before adopting.

## 3. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Table-1. Reasons for Voting

Reasons	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(a) Party affiliation	35	14
(b) Campaign pictures	27	10.8
(c) Candidate's personality	90	36
(d) Personal relationship	20	8
(e) Not applicable	78	31.2
Total	250	100

The above table shows respondents' reason for voting. Only 27, representing 10.8% said they voted because of campaign pictures. The other options were party affiliation 35 (14%), candidate's personality 90 (36%), personal relationship 20 (8%) while 78 (31.2%) said they voted because they had to vote to exercise their franchise as they chose "not applicable".

**Table-2.** Rating for Television campaign pictures

Rating	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(a) Excellent	25	10
(b) Very Good	55	22
(c) Good	103	41.2
(d) Fair	57	22.8
(e) Poor	10	4
Total	250	100

The second table indicates how voters rated the television campaign pictures. Twenty-five respondents (10%) rated it as excellent, 55 (22%) rated it as very good, while 103 representing 41.2% rated the picture as good. It further shows that 57 or 22.8% said it was fair, whereas only 10(4%) rated the pictures as poor.

**Table-3.** Communicativeness of Television Campaign Pictures

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(a) Meaningful	40	16
(b) Appealing	22	8.8
(c) Captivating	30	12
(d) Very good	31	12.4
(e) All of the above	120	48
(f) Poor	5	2
(g) Did not communicate	2	0.8
Total	250	100

Table 3 shows voters' opinion on the extent of the communicativeness of the campaign pictures. Forty (16%) respondents said they were meaningful, 22 (8.8%) said they were appealing, while 30 (12%) said the pictures were captivating. As 31 (12.4%) of the respondents said the pictures were very good, 120 representing 48% chose "All of the above" as their option. This means that they regarded the pictures as Meaningful, Appealing, Captivating and Very good, while 5 (2%) and 2 (0.8%) said the pictures were poor and, did not communicate, respectively.

**Table-4.** Pictorial aid in Remembering and Recall

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
(a) Positive	160	64
(b) Negative	10	4
(c) Partial	55	22
(d) Not quite	25	10
Total	250	100

Table 4 shows respondents' opinion on how pictures could help in remembering and recall. One hundred and sixty or 64% responded positively, while 10 (4%), responded negatively. Fifty five respondents (22%) said pictures aid the situation partially, while 25 (10%) said not quite.



**Table-5.** Other functions performed by Television Campaign Picture

<b>Response</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
(a) Add information to the message	180	72
(b) Help in taking voting decision	47	18.8
(c) Cause a change to another party	9	3.6
(d) Cause to dislike a candidate	14	5.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>

On other functions performed by television campaign pictures, 180 (72%) said they add information to the message, 47 (18.8%) said they help respondents take voting decision, and 9 (3.6%) said they cause a change to another party, while 14 (5.6%) said the pictures cause voters to dislike a candidate.

#### **4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This section discusses the answers to the research questions raised earlier in this study. Six research questions were raised and the answers are provided with reference to relevant data found in tables and other sections of the study.

**Research Question One was:** Do television political campaign pictures have any impact on viewers?

The answer to this question could be further determined by table 1 which indicates that only 27 representing 10.8% of respondents indicated that they voted because of the campaign pictures while a greater percentage (36%) indicated candidate's personality as a motivating factor. Other options include personal relationship and party affiliation. It is therefore concluded that campaign pictures did not make any impression or created any impact on respondents. They took a continuance action which means they stayed on with their candidates or parties, not influenced by pictures.

**Research Question Two was:** Do pictures in Television political campaigns help to determine voters' behavior?

As indicated in Table One, voters were not influenced in any way by television campaign pictures as only 10.8% voted because of the television campaign pictures. Figures in the table also indicate that voters were influenced by other factors other than the television campaign pictures.

These factors include party affiliation, candidate's personality and personal relationship. These factors influenced the voters more than the pictures. However, 31.2% were neutral in their reasons for voting. They just voted. Also in table 5, only 47 (18.8%) respondents said pictures helped them in taking voting decision.

**Research Question Three was:** To what extent are television political campaign pictures communicative in a multicultural environment?

The answer to this question could be seen in table 3 which dwells on the communicativeness of television political campaign pictures. Out of 250 respondents, 120 (48%) said the pictures were meaningful, appealing, captivating and very good as they indicated All of the above. Apart from this, 16%, 8.8% and 12% indicated that the pictures were meaningful, appealing and captivating

respectively. Only 2% said the pictures were poor. This proves the communicativeness of television campaign pictures. However, this did not influence voters.

Also table two indicates that respondents rated the pictures very high as majority indicated Excellent, Very good, good and fair amounting to 96%. This also indicates its communicativeness.

If pictures aid in remembering and recall, they could be said to be communicative. This is indicated in table 4 where 160 (64%) said that television campaign pictures aid in remembering and recall.

**Research Question four was:** Do pictures add dimension to television political campaign messages?

Table 5 showcases other functions performed by television campaign pictures. It indicates that 180 (72%) of the respondents admit that campaign pictures add information to the message. Others chose other options. From this it is believed that television campaign pictures add information (dimensions) to television political campaign messages. As earlier indicated, table 3 shows that pictures are communicative while table 4 indicates that television campaign pictures aid in remembering and recall. All these support the fact that these pictures add dimension to television campaign messages. Apart from these, a combination of picture and sound add more information to communication as the synergy amounts to what Zettl (2005) refers to as Gestalt.

**Research Question five was:** To what extent does the multicultural nature of the Nigerian state affect the outcome of television political campaigns?

The section in this study that shows Nigeria as a multicultural environment indicates the extent of the effect of Nigeria's multicultural nature on the political terrain, including the campaigns.

Political parties are streamlined and partitioned according to ethnic groups and demarcated according to sections of the country. Political parties, according to the section under reference were sectional and ethnic in nature. This did not help matters as this loyalty greatly affected the campaigns as voters ignored campaign pictures and stuck to their parties and candidates, not minding whether they were popular, national in nature or otherwise. The section specifically stated that "apart from ethnic affiliation, political campaigns followed ethnic, cultural and regional lines", adding that "party affiliation in Nigeria has never been very national in outlook". It concluded that television political advertising therefore follows the line of ethnic and cultural affiliations of the parties concerned.

**Research Question six was:** What categories of action do television political campaign pictures elicit on viewers?

Television political campaign pictures are supposed to elicit the following kinds of action on viewers: Adoption, Continuance, Discontinuance and Deterrence. But in this study, only two categories were adopted – Continuance and Deterrence. In Continuance, most respondents (party members) were discovered to have continued with their parties after watching the campaigns. In Deterrence, one of the parties used past figures to discourage others from adopting other parties. But results show that members of the parties and other voters stayed with their respective parties despite the campaign pictures.

## 5. FINDINGS

The success of any television programme is determined by the response behavior of the viewers and the influence of the pictorial accompaniment of the message. However due to some political, environmental and structural variables, messages could be regarded otherwise and their results could be unexpected.

The findings in this study reveal that respondents were not significantly influenced by television political campaign pictures. However they admitted that television political campaign pictures are communicative and persuasive. Even at that, they could not be deterred.

It was also found out that despite the revelation made by television political campaign pictures, respondents, especially the loyalists of certain political parties, still adopted their candidates, taking the “continuance” action. The study also discovered that pictures add a lot of dimensions to political campaign messages, making them more understood and revealing. Viewers of political campaigns believe that the pictures carry impact, but not on them as they have already formed their own opinion. Even with the impression made by the pictures, respondents stuck to their candidates and parties.

However, pictures did not deter them from adopting their candidates no matter how bad viewers are Adoption, Continuance, Discontinuance and Deterrence.

## 6. SUMMARY

Every picture tells a story. It carries a message. Pictures satisfy information needs and enhance understanding of a process. A picture is a mirror of reality. Each detail is presented as real.

Therefore any television story worth its presentation must be accompanied by visuals. Messages carried by pictures are direct, explicit, straight forward, factual and realistic.

Television political campaign is aimed at producing results by persuading viewers to action. The action so produced could take the form of voting for a particular candidate or party, or changing one’s mind from one party or candidate to another. It is also aimed at reinforcing one’s attitude towards a particular party or candidate and dampening one’s enthusiasm towards another considered to be a rival. The impact of communication is seen in the ability of the media to change a person’s behaviour, opinion and attitude. It is a proof that the message is effective. Though the impact of persuasive communication message tends to be exaggerated sometimes, it is believed that when conversion or change occurs it is usually a result of the impact of the campaign or because the persuasive messages are combined with other forces to produce the effect. This is emphasized by [Zettl \(2005\)](#) who says there must be synergy in the process, as an improperly used structure can make sound to interfere with the picture and inhibit the total communication process.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The study was concerned with the impact of television political campaign pictures on the politically conscious viewers in Uyo municipality. It set out to find out if political campaign pictures have the power to communicate to the extent that they could influence viewer’s decision after exposure to the message.

Viewers could respond in the following ways:

- Attending response which entails paying attention to the message, and
- Reacting response which is the tendency to do what the message intended one to do. When the later is accomplished, there is an impact.

However, political campaign pictures are viewed from various perspectives by politically conscious viewers. They do not allow pictures of the other party's campaigns to appeal to them no matter how communicative they may be. This is because of their faithful attachment to their candidates and the parties they are attached to or have sympathy for. No matter how negative their candidates are being portrayed on television, they stick "religiously" to them because of party affiliation.

Nevertheless, political campaign pictures are communicative, informative and complementary to other messages. However, they did not create any significant impact on politically conscious viewers. It is therefore pertinent to conclude with the words of [Bielak \(2003\)](#) who advises that "if you want to communicate via television, you must also know what kind of visual images or pictures will make your messages most meaningful to the viewers.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings of this work, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) Political campaign pictures should appear natural and real to either deter or reinforce people's beliefs.
- (2) Political campaign pictures should follow aesthetic principles.
- (3) The message should be presented more often so that viewers could make adequate assessment of the candidates.
- (4) More visuals and fewer speeches should be the language of television messages. That is, the picture should dominate, while audio should support.
- (5) Messages should reflect local political environment, and not generalised.
- (6) Campaign messages should portray candidates, not just parties.
- (7) Campaign pictures should be such that could be recalled. That is, they should be appealing and captivating.
- (8) Condemnation of parties or candidates by opposing ones should be discouraged by television stations.

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