BRAND ORIENTATION: A PANACEA FOR ELECTORATES' INTENTION TO VOTE IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to evaluate the connection amongst political brand orientation and intention to vote political parties in elections in Rivers State. The researcher employed the descriptive method which allowed for the identification and analysis of a pattern and described the behaviour of the given phenomenon without additional force. The population was all the voters in the twenty- three (23) Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The current population of registered voters in Rivers state is 3,215,273. A sample size of 400 respondents was drawn from the study population using the Taro Yamane formula. The study employed the Correlation analysis to test the hypothesis with the aid of SPSS. The results demonstrate that political brand orientation had a positive influence on voters' intention to vote in Rivers State, Nigeria. It recommends that political parties in Rivers State should consciously work on their brand personality, brand awareness, brand association, brand orientation, perceived quality and brand trust holistically as these factors all work together to achieve success and progress in the political process in every democracy.

Keywords:

Brand orientation, intention to vote, brand awareness and brand trust.

I.1 Introduction

Despite its early origins, lengthy history, and potency, the concept of branding did not emerge as a central element of marketing theory until far into the twentieth century. According to Stern (2006), "brand" was first used in marketing in 1922 as a compound word (brand name), signifying a commercial or private name (Wilson, 2012). According to Hampf & Lindberg-Rapo (2011), brands resembling those of today began to emerge in the 16th century. The French fashion designer Rose Bertin and the English ceramicist Josiah Wedgwood founded some of the first well-known companies (Burke 1996; de Paola 1985). Farquhar goes further to indicate that the rise of mass media advertising in the middle of the 20th century is primarily responsible for the origins and developmental starting points of contemporary branding theories (Farquhar, 1995). Any name, term, design, symbol, or other feature that sets one seller's goods or services apart from those of other vendors is considered a brand, according to Bennett (1988). Ambler (1992) defines a brand from a consumer-focused standpoint as: The promise of the bundles of features that someone acquires and that make them happy. The qualities of a brand might be concrete or intangible, rational or emotional, real or fake.

Brown (1992) takes a wide approach to these ideas in characterising a brand simply nothing essentially than the total of all the mental connections individuals have around it. A brand is a tool used by businesses to differentiate themselves from the competition (purpose). Customers are satisfied and benefit from a brand's unique feature, which makes them eager to pay for it (Wood, 2000).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Due to non-implementation of political strategies today, is leading voter loyalty declining greatly thereby causing political parties to face an increasing difficulty in getting loyal voters (Andy, 2010). The flourishing nature of political marketing has led many voters in democratic countries to vote for the same party in subsequent elections (Shacha, 2003). The responses of voters during the 2019 election show a low patronage of political parties. This is the motivation for this study. It seems political parties today take voter loyalty for granted and this problem is majorly responsible for the series of defections in the Politics of Rivers State. A typical significant example is the case of the former deputy governorship candidate of the African Action Congress (AAC) Chief Akpo BombaYeeh who defected to the People's Democratic Party (PDP) (*Tide*, March 27, 2019). The issue of defection of stakeholders is not just Rivers State problem but is a national problem that needs to be tackled which formed the essence of this study. The issue showed that when the dimensions of political brand equity are put in place and there is ownership mentality defection will be scarce. This dearth of information on this important topic is what informed the researcher to investigate the relationship between political brand equity and voters' loyalty in Rivers State, Nigeria.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the association between brand orientation and intention to vote. The particular goals were to:

1. Determine the magnitude of connexion between brand awareness and intention to vote in Rivers States, Nigeria.

2. Examine the degree of association between brand trust and intention to vote in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Study variables and Research Framework

Our study variable as a guide in the study, are brand orientation (predictor variable) with its dimensions as brand awareness and brand trust while intention to vote (criterion variable). Based on our research variables, this study is expressed in functional relationships noted below:
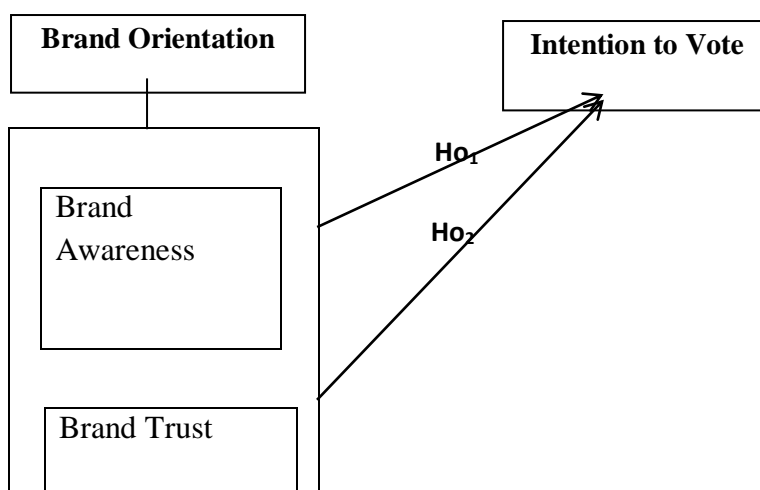
BO = Brand Orientation

IV = Intention to Vote

BA = Brand Awareness

BT = Brand Trust

Operational Framework of the Study

Table 1: Operational framework of the Study

Source: Desk Research, 2021.

1.4 Research Questions

1. To what magnitude does political brand awareness influence intention to vote in Rivers State, Nigeria?

2. What association subsists between brand trust and intention to vote in Rivers State, Nigeria?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no substantial association between political brand awareness and intention to vote in Rivers State.

Ho₂: No significant association exists between brand trust and intention to vote in Rivers State.

Literature Review

2.1. Brand Orientation

The first author to refer to brand orientation in the literature, Urde (1999), defines it as a strategy in which the organization's operations focus on establishing, growing, and protecting a brand identity through continuous interactions with target consumers in order to obtain long-lasting competitive advantages through brands (Urde, 1999; Evans et al., 2012; Wong & Merrilees, 2005). According to Urde (1999), brand orientation is a seven-dimensional paradigm that encompasses target group, corporate identity, corporate designation, product, trademark, brand vision, and positioning. This conceptualisation also encompasses behavioral-to-business orientations, which concentrate on the orientation in terms of performed behaviours and activities. Ewing and Napoli (2005) were trying to convey a sense of the philosophical and behavioural approaches to the concept when they defined brand orientation as the organizational-wide process of developing and sustaining a common appreciation of the brand's significance that offers greater value to stakeholders as well as exceptional performance to the organisation. Ewing and Napoli (2005) outline three essential components of brand orientation in a non-profit context: orchestration, market sensing, and engagement, using Keller's Brand Report Card as a basis. Wong & Merrilees (2005) define brand orientation as a mentality that ensures how the brand will be seen, emphasised, and favoured in the marketing strategy (Evans, Bridson, & Rentschler, 2012).

Brand orientation includes customer happiness, customer loyalty, brand equity, brand cognisance, and the quality of accommodations provided (Hirvonen & Laukkanen, 2014; Wong & Merrilees, 2005). Brand orientation, according to Hankinson (2001), is the extent to which a business or political party uses its ideology as a brand and launches branding campaigns. The foundational element of brand orientation is customer satisfaction within the confines of the core brand identity. The core concept of brand orientation, which primarily uses an inside-out approach, is brand identity (Urde et al., 2013).

2.1.1. Brand Awareness

The state's political parties are particularly active in brand vigilance, with both the PDP and the APC doing so. According to Alkhawaldeh, Al-Salaymeh, Alshare, and Eneizan (2017), brand awareness is crucial to brand equity, which is based on cognisance, memory, experience, and recognition. It involves stimulating associated brand associations, which may be either good or negative, and brand recall (Aaker, 1991). The ability of a prospective customer to remember and identify a brand in the face of rivals' brand equity and customer loyalty is known as brand vigilance (Keller, 1993). The capacity of a potential consumer to

remember and identify a brand as belonging to a certain product category is known as brand awareness (Aaker, 1991). Aaker (1996) lists brand opinion, top-of-mind brand ascendancy, and brand cognisance as additional attributes of brand vigilance in addition to recognition and recall.

2.1.2 Brand Trust

Trust, as posited by Kimpakorn &Tocquer (2009), is a key to building a relationship with others. In political brand equity, trust plays a major role in the development of voters or consumers staunchness to a party (Rachmat, 2014). Lassar, Mittal & Sharma (1995), Singh & Sirdeshmukh (2000), Alkhawaldeh, Salleh and Halim (2016) argue that for any relationship to last long, trust is the key factor. In the same direction, Ramasesshan, Rabbanee & Hui (2013) aver that brand trust is a gregarious construct while Yousif & Alsamydai (2012) recommend that trust should be implemented in politics due to the significant role it plays in the development of long-term relationship between political brands and voters.

2.2 Criterion Variable- Intention to Vote

Any voter who adheres to a party will remain voter of that party. Consumer allegiance causes repetition in patronage, in terms of voting choices, of the same party. Voters that are behaviourally loyal to a political brand, tends to vote for the political party (Needham, 2006; Smith & Spotswood, 2013; Mishra & Mishra, 2014). Intention to vote is an important aspect in political marketing which demands meticulous visual examination. Drawing from the findings of their study, Alkhawaldeh, Salleh & Halim (2016)canvass that the context, cognisance and image of political parties do not play a paramount role in making a repeat purchase (in this case voting choice) due to low involvement of voters in building political brands. Lee, et al. (2016), sees intention to vote as the capacity and ability of voters to vote with their preferences after deliberation, without having their voting choices. The political climate and prejudicial attitudes may limit voters' ability to make decisions. Beck, Dalton, Green, and Huckfeldt (2002) asserted that discussing facts with others might cause one's voting preferences to change. According to Esa and Hashim (2017), a rise in awareness may result in a rise in young people's desire to vote. According to Yoon, Pinkleton, and Ko (2005), voters are more likely to support a politician with a high level of credibility if they employ negative political advertising.

2.3 Brand Orientation and Intention to vote

The link between brand and brand allegiance can engender relational exchanges that are highly valued in political marketing (Tsiotsou, 2013). This is because brand trust is highly influential in the electoral deportment. When a party exhibits lack of trust it signifies that voters would not have confidence in the political candidate (Ahmed, Lodhi & Shahzad, 2011). Brand trust, which is viewed as a psychological state whereby an individual is disposed to take or accept susceptibility due to their positive prospects of the intentions or deportment of another (Adewale & Bamidele, 2016, citing Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer,1998), is very vital for a political brand to win support (Sherman & Schiffman, 2008). Sometimes, one experiences trust infringement when there is lack of application of

adequate adeptness in carrying out the brand (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). The fact remains that when customers trust a company, they will refer others to the company. Brand trust has a way of turning a slack customer to an allegiant customer of a brand. Conversely, brand trust may be seen as the consumer's reliance on the brand's ability, honesty, integrity, truthfulness, and inclination. Additionally, it is the consumer's readiness to trust that the brand will fulfil its mission (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Matzler, Grabner-Krauter & Bidmon, 2006). Furthermore, according to Morgan & Hunt (1994), trust is viewed as a visual state that a customer utilises to establish confidence in a brand because of its reliability and trustworthy qualities.

2.4 Three-Stage Model

Although the three-stage model is among the most common, well recognised, and mirrored theory for political branding in scholarly literature, it serves as the second theoretical foundation for this study. Three separate processes make up this political marketing model, which offers a pattern for achieving a market orientation and ultimately winning an election (Savigny, 2010 referenced in Donovan, 2012). This theory was initially adopted by Robert Keith in 1960 (Egan 1999) and was further expatiated Dominic Wring in 1997 as a theoretical framework for political marketing. Other notable scholars (Donovan, 2012; Lees-Marshemen , 2009) also contributed to the evolution and widespread of the theory. The following is an expansion of the three steps by Durmaz & Direkçi (2015):

Step 1: Determine customer demand, incorporate it into the product and marketing, and adjust as necessary.

Step 2: Inform customers of product changes based on their requests and requirements.

Step 3: Delivering a refined product that will meet consumer desire for healthier options would increase the company's profit margin.

Due to its assumption that "parties have the ability to identify what voters desire through approaches which incorporate advanced polling methodology and responses from target groups," this model may be helpful. Conceptually, the idea is that in order to win elections, parties and candidates should pay attention to (targeted) public opinion and give the people the "product" they desire (Savigny cited in Durmaz & Direkçi, 2015). In order to attain a market orientation and ultimately electoral success, the candidate might use this approach, which consists of three separate processes (Savigny, 2010 cit. in Durmaz & Direkçi, 2015). In order to give the electorate the "product" they desire, the model requires political organisations to carefully identify their target demographics for public opinion, which inevitably results in the candidate winning the election (Donovan, 2012). The Three-Stage model facilitates the basic path for effective political marketing, but it ignores a crucial link in the communication chain between the electorate and political candidates: the biassed and agenda-driven media. Even beyond the message that politicians try to get over, the media increasingly serves as an unchecked additional source of influence. Any model that aims to change voters' attitudes must take this reality into account (Donovan, 2012).

2.5 Empirical Review

In their own study, "The Role of Fashion Innovativeness, Brand Image, and Love Mark in Promoting Loyalty towards Fashion-Related Brands," Cho, Fiore, and Russell (2015) discovered that allegiance is a direct result of brand awareness. Similarly, Alkhawaldeh, Salleh, and Halim (2016) conducted a research named "Brand equity and brand loyalty: New perspective" on brand equity and brand allegiance. Their findings showed that voters are not significantly influenced by cognisance or image when it comes to casting repeat ballots for political parties in later elections. Additionally, they discovered that policymakers who deal with political brands must concentrate on political brand awareness and perception in order to draw in new voters in the near future with the goal of establishing a lasting connection. Parker (2012) conducted a research titled "Value of Candidate Brand Equity." Voters must be aware of a political party's existence in order to choose which one to support, according to a comparison of US presidential contenders during the 2008 primary election campaign.

Keller (1993) assessed brand equity using the strength, favorability, and originality of brand connections. Ashraf (2018) conducted study on how customer responses are affected by brand association aspects. They retrieved data from 300 respondents in marketplaces surrounding Punjab City. According to their study's findings, there is a positive correlation between brand association aspects and customer purchasing behaviour. The findings also shown that brand association functions, including assurance, social identity, personal identification, and status, positively influence recommendations and the continuation of in-brand and premium price purchases. In their study, Wong and Merreillees (2005) established the prevalence of a strong association between brand performance and brand orientation. Some other scholars (Baumgarth, 2010; Hirvonen & Laukkanen, 2014) further agreed that brand orientation has a beneficial impact on market and economic performance.

Osakwe, Chovancova, and Ogbonna (2015) linked market-sensing abilities and brand orientation to SMEs' profitability. They found that brand orientation gives SMEs a way to more consistently seize market opportunities, minimise obstacles, lower product differentiation, and boost media and market integration. According to a different study by Mujan (2015), brand orientation is a rigorous process of brand development in which SMEs evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of their prior market positioning. In other words, brand orientation is unquestionably a strategic process that can improve brand performance.

3.1 Methodology

The essence of every research is to investigate some phenomena as they are play out in a given research scope. In this study, our focus is an investigation of how political brand orientation affects intention to vote to political parties in elections in Rivers State. The researcher employed the descriptive method which allowed for the identification and analysis of a pattern and described the behaviour of the given phenomenon without additional force (Shuttleworth, 2008). A cross-sectional survey method was used to establish the level of customers' or voters' satisfaction at a given point in time. Furthermore, the explanatory research design was used to show the predictor power of the two variables (dependent and independent), thereby showing cause and effect.

In this study, the population was all the voters in the twenty- three (23) Local Government Areas of Rivers State. The current population of registered voters in Rivers state is 3,215,273 (Egbas, 2019; Independent National Electoral Commission, 2019). A sample size of 400 respondents was drawn from 3,215,273 of registered voters from twenty-three (23) Local Government Areas in Rivers State, using the Taro Yamane. Furthermore, a validated questionnaire was distributed to the respondents while Correlation analysis was used to examine the association between brand orientation and intention to vote. This analysis technique was used in because its test association identified variables and was aided .via the use of SPSS. Furthermore, this tool was used because the variables were measured in numeric scale and specifically, the tool measures relationship/association.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Test of Hypothesis One

Table 4.1.1: Relationship between Political Brand Awareness and intention to Vote

Correlations

		Political Brand Awareness	Intention to vote
Political Brand Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.833**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	363	363
Intention to Vote	Pearson Correlation	.833**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	363	363

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Source: Field Survey Data, 2021, SPSS Output

Decision: The correlation coefficient of 0.833 and a probability value of 0.000 are shown in Table 4.1.1 above. This finding suggests that political brand knowledge and voting intention have a substantial and favourable association. We concluded that Voting intention and political brand awareness are significantly correlated. This further signified that voting intentions of the electorates in Rivers State is largely influenced by their political waawareness.

Table 4.1.2: Relationship between Political Brand Trust and Voters' intention to vote

Correlations

		Political Brand Trust	Voters' Intention to vote
Political Brand Trust	Pearson Correlation	1	.931**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	363	363
Voters' Intention to vote	Pearson Correlation	.931**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	363	363

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Source: Field Survey Data, 2021, SPSS Output

According to Table 4.1.2, the coefficient of determination is 0.867, or 86.7%, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.931 and a p value of 0.000. This demonstrates that voters' propensity to vote in Rivers State is strongly and favourably correlated with their faith in political brands. We therefore holds that Voters' intention to vote in Rivers State is significantly influenced by political brand trust as a political brand equity tool.

4.2: Discussion of Findings

In this section, the observed relationships are discussed and the relative positions of the study with regards to the positions of the previous studies and theories examined in the literature of this study are stated.

The first findings of the study resulted from hypothesis one which sought to examine the association between political brand awareness and voters' intention to vote. The results showed the existence of a substantial connection between political brand awareness and voters' intention to vote (R = 0.833 & 0.886; R^2 = 0.694 & 0.785 ~ 69.4% & 78.5% for correlation value and multiple regression, respectively. The outcome demonstrates that political brand awareness engenders positive impacts on voters' intention to vote in Rivers State. Conceivable justification for this result could be attributed to the fact that most respondents agreed that the items on brand awareness could assert positive change on their attitude.

Similarly, the second finding of the study revealed that political brand trust significantly associate with voters' intention to vote. The results indicated the existence of a substantial connexion between political brand trust and voters' intention to vote in Rivers State as depicted by (R = 0.931 & 0.845; R^2 = 0.867 & 0.714 ~ 86.7% & 71.4%).

5.1 Conclusion

The results of the findings on the dimensions of political brand orientation, namely, political brand awareness, and brand trust all contribute significantly towards achieving voters' intention to vote in Rivers State of Nigeria. In the light of this, we conclude that the dimensions of the predictor variable can significantly increase the level of voters' intention to vote in Rivers State.

5.2 Recommendations

Due to the outcome of this study, following are put forward

- Political party policymakers in Rivers State should give attention to political brand equity by building credibility, security, reliability, brand designation and performances as well as overall excellence of their party brands to attract new supporters in the short term in order to build long term relationships and loyalty.

- Political parties should deliberately fashion their party ideology and philosophy to be appealing to voters.

- Political party brand trust should be built into the political process because of its importance in the development of sustainable long -term relationship between political brands and voters.

- Finally, political parties in Rivers State should consciously work on their brand personality, brand awareness, brand association, brand orientation, perceived quality and brand trust holistically as these factors all work together to achieve success and progress in the political process in every democracy.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

Against the background of the analysis and findings of this study, the following suggestions for future studies are advanced:

- Measures of voters' loyalty can be considered in subsequent studies since the current study adapted very few measures.

- This study focused on branding and politics in Nigeria; further studies can investigate the same variable in other sectors of the Nigerian socio-political sphere to ascertain the compatibility levels of the findings.

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