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## IMAGE MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC ACCEPTANCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN RIVERS STATE

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### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the relationship between image management and public acceptance of political parties in Rivers State. The aim was to examine the relationship between image management and public acceptance of political parties in Rivers State using organizational reputation and brand competence as dimensions. The study adopted cross-sectional research design. 332 copies of questionnaire distributed. The Multiple Regression Analysis Statistical tool was used with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23.0), discriminant validity (AVE) and Cronbach Alpha verified the internal consistency and validity status and the results were positive. The findings of the study showed that image management significantly related with public acceptance of political parties, thus enhancing trustworthiness and advocacy. Based on the findings, the study, recommends that, Political Parties should focus on other methods such as image management, communication, and marketing mix in order to increase political brand awareness and image among potential voters. Political parties' leaders need to understand Rivers State's voters' perception and ideology for maximum acceptance. Thus, parties' leaders should keep conducting regular surveys to understand public needs and expectations of political parties.

### KEY WORDS:

Image Management, Public Acceptance, Political Parties.



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## 1.0 Introduction

The political history in Nigeria has observed terrific variations date back from the time of military rule to democratic dispensations presently (Glory & Agnes, 2016). This paradigm shift as evidence in the Nigerian's political arena and how to reposition nation's political image, electoral processes and societal acceptance are among the numerous drives many scholars and practitioners in the field of political marketing are interested in this area of study/research. In today's competitive business atmosphere, image is an impression that is continuously increasing in relevance. Strong image of our political organization has an important role in achieving the goals of the organization. Virtually, every country, Government and political organizations are not only one of the most significant publics for corporation/non – profit public relations, they are also active players and active users of public relations acquaintances. They build up their own image strategies and tactics to promote enabling relationships with various publics and manage communication within and outside their political environment (Gregory, 2006).

Corporations today spend an increasing amount of resources on building attractive, distinct, and justifiable images using reputation management, organizational identity, organizational competence, image repair strategies and organizational personification tools as well as political culture management that align with the organizational behavior as well as communicated official self-images (Stromback & Kioussis, 2011). Creating these organizational images is good but managing the images is a big concern to organization which this dissertation is interested on. Image management refer to the planning, organizing and controlling of actions taken to create, maintain, and when necessary, recuperate a needed image in the eyes of organizational stakeholders like customers, electorates, civil servants, foreign investors and so on (Willi et al., 2014). An organization's image "is a holistic and vivid consciousness held by an individual or a particular group towards the same organization (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). Research demonstrates that political parties must manage a desirable image in order to be successful and populace acceptance (Fariaa & Mendes, 2013). Furthermore, parties that fail to engage in successful image management increase the chances for public reject (Gilpin, 2010; Seeger et al., 1998). Lilleker (2006) has it that, image is the public representation of the political leader, the candidate in elections, the political party etc perceived by the public. The representation which public held about the political leaders, the candidates for performing public matters etc. is the crossroad point of the messages which the political leader cum political party sends and the manner how he behaves on the one hand and the expectations that the public (electorates) has from the political leader cum political party on the other hand (Trent et al., 2011).

Prior researches have been conducted in respect to this image management. Cervera et al. (2012) studied on the University image and student perception using identity, reputation and image repair; Pérez and Torres, (2017) investigated on the evaluation of the organizational image of a university in a higher education institution. However, there are fewer researches that studied on the relationship of this concept with others, such as satisfaction and loyalty (Chandra et al., 2019; Hassan & Shamsudin, 2019). No study was done on image management and public acceptance of political parties in Rivers State. For this reason, it was considered relevant to carry out the evaluation of image management and public acceptance of political parties in Rivers State conceptualizing this phenomenon using organizational reputation, brand competence, brand personification and organizational identity as the independent variable dimensions and trustworthiness and advocacy as the dependent variable measures and ethnic orientation as the moderator.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

In today's bloodthirsty political environment, there is a competitive pressure and the desire to be recognized, supported and accepted by the general public have triggered political parties in Nigeria to invest millions naira in campaigns and ideology in every election period in order to strengthen their corporate images, reputations, identity, competence and personification. One way to run a successful public acceptance is through image management, which are an on-going process of researching a party's image among political marketing, clarifying its advantages, examining the factors influencing its image and leading to changes over the years, dealing with image-related crises, and delivering relevant messages to different electorates. It seems worrisome to ask what steps political parties should take in order to improve their image and to market it positively?

However, Nigerian politics as a brand is suffering from image problems and security challenges, local and foreign investors are scared of investing because of the destruction of investments and looting of property during general elections in the country. There are eighteen (18) registered political parties in Nigeria by Independent National Electoral Commission but only two is a household name (All Progressive Congress and Peoples Democratic Party). Others are suffering from building sustainable image of which finance is one of the challenges they have in managing their image. Also, personality is another challenge facing political parties for public acceptance. Some of the personalities are not trusted. Another challenge is poor community service by some political parties, which has dented their image and thus, affect public acceptance. Given that reasonable volume of research exist on image management focusing on the political parties, but little attention was accorded to public acceptance. Therefore, the problem is to examine the nexus between image management and public acceptance of political parties in Rivers State.

## 1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between image management and public acceptance of political parties in Rivers State. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- (i) To ascertain the impact of organizational reputation on public acceptance.
- (ii) To determine the influence of brand competence on public acceptance.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### Theoretical Foundations

**Self-congruity theory:** Self-congruity is the theory that underpins this paper. According to Aaker (1996) some organizations are being predisposed as medium to communicate an element of self-identity. The TSC suggests that self-concept image and organizational image are described through mutual constructs. In furtherance, TSC is refers as a degree of congruence between self-concept and brand/product concept since brand users tend to opt for offerings that reaffirm their self-representation (Sirgy, 1982). According to Hong and Zinkhan (1994), self-representation stands as knowledge construct which conceptually associates to information about oneself. External stimuli attuned with self-representation would be likely to accept and retain, in evaluation with those external stimuli that are not well-suited with self-representation.

Therefore, because of the influence of TSC, self-identity of a brand-user should be congruent with the personality of the brand they acquire. Hence, an organization with reliable organizational image that is congruent to the brand-user can play the position of a cohort or an acquaintance that the brand-user is familiar and comfortable with (Phau & Lau, 2000). For example, brand-users who possess distinctive attributes that mirror enthusiasm will be more comfortable associating with family and friends who are exciting. In the same vein, organizations with such an image would also be an ideal acquaintance. Based on this ground, political parties should affirm their image to align with the societal image or electorate's self-image. This will boost the loyalty level of the political party's members' base.

### 2.1 Concept of Image Management

Image in political parties should be investigated at two levels (Wan & Schell, 2007). The first is the symbolic depiction of the party's personality or character that is portrayed to the community. At this level, scholars are concerned about the nature of symbols or messages generated by the organization, and tend to criticize the "motivation" behind such skilfully designed communication. The second level is what Boulding (1973) called "subjective knowledge structure" —an individual's personal understandings and interpretations of the things or objects he perceives. The image, as social representations of political organization is formed due to: (1) the influence of the messages send, directly or indirectly, in the public space they act or represent; (2) the influence of roomers; (3) through the electorates satisfaction correlated with the quality of the offerings and the power of purchasing; (4) the quality of the managerial act, based in the positive results attained in the primary reality during a full cycle of management; (5) the impact of political parties messages on different target groups with strong power of influence; (6) the messages that come from third parties, seen as other pressure groups or interested groups like stakeholders, depending on their own interests.

In furtherance to this, image management is the reflection of a company good and bad in the mind of its customers and stakeholders and how it is restore or repair when default public criticism. Organizational image management can change from time to time, in that, brand-user or organizational loyalists needs and wants to keep changing and their expectation about the organization changes which varies between individuals. One of the greatest advantages of the image management is that it enables shortening of the time for reception of the message. Especially today when people to a certain extent show saturation from the politics, shortening of the time when the citizens will receive the message is extremely important. In electronic media, viewers re-member the impression which politicians leave with their performance longer than the exact words they use during their performances (Grabe & Bucy, 2009). Probably for this reason, according to Manin (1997), politicians in the contemporary politics are increasingly starting to behave like media personalities. Hence, he notices that the representative democracy transforms into democracy where the audience has the last and the most important word. There are politicians, who happened to be aware of the influence image management has in the creation of the representation of the politicians and who seriously took care of his image.

**2.2 Public Acceptance:** Public experiences are major determinants of consumer selection and preferences. The customer feedback reflects the history of transactions related to new products or new services on their acceptance or rejection by previous buyers, greatly shaping market reputation and customers. Some other studies presented that favourable public feedback can be translated into advantageous image and impact public acceptance. Previous individuals' feedback greatly shapes organizational image and impacts potential customers' purchasing decisions. It is refers to viewpoint response to a number of experiences , including offerings, information search, ordering, payment, customer service interactions, delivery, post-purchase issue resolution, and satisfaction with one's purchases (Foxall, 2003).

On the other side, it is the overall public perceptions of the excellence and effectiveness of offerings (products or services) offered by an organization. Like some directions from Foxall (2003), the public have learnt about goods and services to a large extent by way of the development of experiences from trial and error. Additionally, when businesses treat public feedback as a signal of unobserved quality, customers are to be more reluctant to purchase services with less favourable response, even if all services are claimed to possess the same quality and the same prices (Eastlick & Feinberg, 1999). Public acceptance is defined as the intent of the actual choices of new products or services by individuals of group of individuals that make up the society (Chung & Holdsworth, 2009). Dick and Basu (1994) defined acceptance as the image about firm goods and services on the trust of consumer behaviours. Based on the review of related literature, trustworthiness and advocacy were used to measure public acceptance.

**2.2.1 Trustworthiness:** Trustworthiness is defined as "message source's perceived motivation to provide accurate and truthful information about an offering or what should be rendered" (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). According to Moorman et al., (1993) trustworthiness is a keenness to rely on an exchange associate in whom one has confidence to enter into business with or better still generally accepted to take a public office. Also trust determines what people expect from situation and this reduces uncertainty in both social and business interactions (Fan & Miao, 2012). Trustworthiness is the capability of an entity to consistently perform its intended mission or required function without failing. It is unstated to be the likelihood of performances effectively (Stapelberg, 2009). The main spot of trustworthiness is consistency or stability of performances.

According to Ayas (2008), trustworthiness can be defined as 'the brand-users' willingness to accept the risks against an interest seller based on positive expectations about the future behaviours of the seller'. Trust can be seen as the consumers' knowledge and opinion that the organization will meet and surpass their needs. Previous studies on trust have identified trust as precursory to the creation of loyalty, highlights the positive impact of trust on consumer loyalty (Kumar et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2011). Trustworthiness means that whether a firm is willing to deliver what it has promised and expertise means whether a firm is able to meet what is promised (Baek & King, 2011). Once customers feel satisfied, they are more motivated to make a repeat purchase from their supplier again (Gray & Marizka, 2014).

### 2.2.2 Advocacy

Advocacy entails passing of information between non-commercial communicators (i.e. someone who is not rewarded and a receiver concerning an outlet, brand, product, or service) (Encyclopedia, 2015). The most effective types of marketing programmes that firms adopt are those that cost nothing, or next to nothing, and prevent work. Advocacy is one of such marketing tactics that are commonly used by firms to aid their marketing efforts. The term advocacy is used to describe a situation whereby existing satisfied customers voluntarily commend a firm within their circle of trust. Advocacy is an oral person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator, the person being seen as independent from the brand, product, or service (Petasis & Opoku-Mensah, 2009). The above definition entails face-to-face, oral involvement between a communicator and a receiver.

Advocacy extinguishes immediately it proceeds forth due to the spontaneous way it occurs and disappears. The communicator is not attached to the product, service, organization or political party under consideration. A positive WOM may appear to have more influence than a well-researched printed source of product information (Ladhari et al., 2011). There is a general acceptance by researchers that positive WOM has a tremendous influence on behavior than other marketing communication source. Word of mouth advocacy is a method of promoting the products of a firm to new customers through mostly voluntary and spontaneous positive WOM from existing satisfied customers to the firm without organization prior knowledge.

### 2.3 Linkage between Image Management and Public Acceptance

Customer perceptions of a firm create a platform for organization to manage its corporate image thereby increase their acceptance within the society confinement. Some researchers affirmed that an establishment image influences public's reactions to a particular corporate action, products and services (Alvesson, 1990; Balmer & Greyson, 2003; Cornelissen et al., 2007; Illia & Greyser, 2013; Illia & Lurati, 2006). Thus, image management represents one of the failings of the traditional PR model, because it suggests that organizations can control their image in the hands of stakeholders (Elsbach, 2003). Good corporate image management is likely to give trustworthiness and credibility to consumers or industrial buyers, which in turn leads to an increase in the public acceptance of a brand (Cretu & Brodie, 2007).

According to Alsamydai (2004), one of the important roles of a political party is how to manage a positive image for its party and candidates to the mind of the people (electorates). The empirical studies such as Humphrey and Brown (2002), for example, illustrate how attempts to redefine the image management of a British institution of higher education to be recognized as a university may be rejected by the members because the projected organizational image management is perceived as decoupled from the organizational history, tradition, culture, and identity. Hatch and Schultz (2004) point out that image management may result in dysfunctional organizations, as too much focus on projecting organizational image leads to organizational narcissism, while too much focus on the external images may lead to hype-adaption and a loss of culture.

#### 2.3.1 Organizational Reputation and Public Acceptance

Organizational reputation is a word much used today as a discernment of past deeds and future behavior of an entity or organization viewed not in separation but in the circumstance of what others are doing in the marketplace or conventional rendezvous. This relativity is vital and a good one is earned through hard work yet can be quickly lost through misfortune or incompetence. Apart from the dynamics of organizational reputation, the quality depends on the relative values of the entity or its stakeholders. A politician might be judged to have a good reputation on service discharge, but constituency security is likewise a business-critical success factor. Organizational reputation has been described as a more active, centralised, focused and scientific approach to communicating with stakeholders (Fombrun et al., 2000).

To Fombrun (1996) organizational reputation is described as the overall assessments of organizations image by their stakeholders (especially the public). They are cumulative representation of impressions by stakeholders of an organization's ability to fulfil their expected promises, whether these stakeholders are interested in accepting the organization's offering, working for the company, or investing in the company's shares. Organizational

reputation states ones seeking to be not just visible but trustworthy and believable among all stakeholders regarding an organization or political party as the case may be. Organizational reputations are based on organizational actions, and those actions are based upon organizational members' co-creation of the organization, based upon their perceptions of what the organization is (that is, its core values) (van der Merwe, & Puth, 2014). Consequently, the following hypotheses were formed:

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between organizational reputation and trustworthiness.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between organizational reputation and advocacy.

### 2.3.2 Brand Competence and Public Acceptance

Brand competence refers to what extent the brand has reliable, intelligent and successful characteristics. Brand competence is exuding unique traits of a brand such as reliability, intelligence and success (Aaker, 1997). In essence, brand competence entails that a brand had proven to consumers its ability to deliver time and time again. It manifests the expertise power of the individual's personality. If a politician or political office holder is competent, populace relies on him/ her on the basis of his/ her competence. A strong image management practice leads to brand competence that is favourable, unique, strong and congruent in the minds of consumers (Aaker, 1999). An organization as part of its unique attributes must be able to align itself to depict a quality of reliability, intelligence and success in their brand offering. This creates a level of satisfaction to brand users who accept such offer. Brand competence plays an enormous role in brand differentiation in the world of politics. It is a major factor or traits in differentiating political parties (Aaker, 1999).

A competent party (brand) is one that has the capability to interpret electorates (customers) 'trouble and to meet the needs (Pornsiri, 2016). Brand competence is also a considerable manner which develops party trust. A political party must have some characteristics that satisfy electorates' needs (Hasan & Muhammad, 2010). All political parties want to build their competence in few key areas and to deal with their party within these domains. It is a duty of every marketer to meet exact demands of their customers who are related to their brands. Organizations would not create suspicion in the consumers' mind about brand competence. Consumers must be persuaded to obtain a relation to the brand competence. Marketers should make good decision and use key opinion leaders, which are viewed as authorities in particular areas, to present them as of the brand. Competent brand consists of crucial elements for solving consumers' issues. Based on this backdrop, the following hypotheses were formulated:

**Ho<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between brand competence and trustworthiness.

**Ho<sub>4</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between brand competence and advocacy.

### 3.0 Methodology

The aim of this study is investigate the correlation between image management and public acceptance of political parties in Rivers state. Given the nature of this paper as to the need for data collection through questionnaire distribution, the study adopted cross-sectional survey due to its capacity to study groups of individuals located in a geographical region, at a particular point in time. Basically, the population of this study comprised registered voters in Rivers State. As at 27<sup>th</sup> of October, 2022, Rivers State has a total of three million five hundred and thirty-two thousand, nine hundred and ninety (3,532,990) registered voters (Independent National Electorate Commission, 2022). Also, there are eighteen (18) registered political parties in Nigeria (INEC, November, 2022) and three hundred and nineteen (319) political wards and four thousand four hundred and forty-two polling units in Rivers State (INEC, August, 2022). Based on this background, the researcher will not study all the elements in the population, this gives rise to sampling. Considering the nature of the study population, Three Hundred and Eighty Four (384) was drawn as the sample size. This decision is supported by of Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) which recommends that any population further than One Hundred Thousand (100, 000) will by default, generate a sample size of Three Hundred and Eighty Four (384) (See appendix). It should be noted here that, the Krejcie and Morgan's sample size calculation was based on  $p = 0.05$  where the probability of committing type I error is less than 5 %. Purposive sampling was adopted in order to identify,

involve and select individuals or groups of individuals that are dexterous and well-informed with the phenomenon of interest. Multiple Regression Analysis was adopted in testing various hypotheses.

**Table 1: Measurement Model: Reliability and Validity for OR, BC, T and A**

Construct	Item	Loading	CR	AVE	$\alpha$
Organizational Reputation	OR1	0.845	0.95	0.80	0.832
	OR2	0.921			
	OR3	0.894			
	OR4	0.911			
	OR5	0.888			
Brand Competence	BC1	0.899	0.94	0.77	0.793
	BC2	0.847			
	BC3	0.798			
	BC4	0.901			
	BC5	0.931			
Trustworthiness	T1	0.873	0.92	0.76	0.803
	T2	0.855			
	T3	0.844			
	T4	0.802			
	T5	0.841			
Advocacy	A1	0.894	0.96	0.82	0.817
	A2	0.911			
	A3	0.944			
	A4	0.891			
	A5	0.893			

Source: SMARTPLS Result Output

As evidenced in Table 1, the study witnessed that all the observed variables (statement items) factor loaded was high against their elemental factors (latent variables), owing to factor loadings ranging from 0.798 to 0.944. These values are all above the suggested threshold of 0.6, implying that they were valid measures of their latent factors. Also, for all cases, CR, AVE and Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) were higher than their suggested threshold values of 0.5 respectively. All these imply that our data achieve convergent validity. For discriminant validity, we follow the usual procedure by comparing the Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) with the multiple regression coefficients between the constructs. The measurement analysis shows that organizational reputation, brand competence, trustworthiness and advocacy are all objectively and validly measured by their respective statement items contained in our research instrument.

#### 4.0 Data Analysis and Presentation

The data analysis was done using multiple regression.

**Table 2: Regression Analysis showing the relationship between image management and public acceptance**

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted (R <sup>2</sup> )	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	.908 <sup>a</sup>	.824	.811	.14787	1967.248	.001**
2	.790	.625	.620	.30450	136.121	.000**

**Regression Model 1:  $T = 0.192 + [(-0.037OR) + (0.730BC)]$**

The model 1 revealed the linear relationship between organizational reputation (OR), brand competence (BC) and trustworthiness (T). The result indicated a regression relationship ( $R$ ) = 0.908 as well as regression square ( $R^2$ ) = 0.824 which was equivalent to 82.4%. This showed that a positive and strong nexus existed between the variables as indicated in the decision rule. This further explained that 82.4% variation can be explained by factors within the model used for the study while the remaining 17.6% can only be suggested by other factors in the model used for the study. The F-ratio ( $F_{2, 332}=21967.248$ ) showed significant effects in existence and this revealed the strength of the model used for the study. The t-ratio statistic revealed significant impact of organizational reputation and brand competence on trustworthiness. This analysis outputs revealed that organizational reputation and brand competence made significant contribution to public acceptance of political parties in Rivers State. Furthermore, the (p-value) is less than ( $<$ ) 0.05, we therefore rejected the established null hypotheses one and three that no significant relationship between organizational reputation, brand competence and trustworthiness of political parties in Rivers State.

#### **Regression Model 2: $A = 3.017 + [(0.190OR) - (0.337BC)]$**

The results of the multiple regression variables indicated  $R = 0.790$ ,  $R^2=0.625$  which is equal to 62.5% and this is the explanatory strength of the model used. It means that only 62.5% variation can be explained by factors within the model used while 37.5% can only be explained by other external quantitative and qualitative factors of the model used for the dissertation. The f-ratio ( $F_{2, 332}=136.121$ ) showed significant effects in existence and this revealed the appropriateness of the model used for the study. The t-ratio statistic showed significant for the two dimensions of the predictor variable to the present status of advocacy. These results revealed that the two proxies of the predictor made significant contribution. Also, the p-value  $< 0.05$  for  $H_2$  and  $H_4$  which means they were all rejected as regard to advocacy.

### **4.1 Discussion of Findings**

#### **Relationship between Organizational Reputation and Public Acceptance (trustworthiness and advocacy)**

Hypothesis one ( $H_{01}$ ) aimed at examining the relationship between organizational reputation and trustworthiness of political parties in Rivers State. The hypothesis was tested using Multiple Regression Analysis. Our analysis showed that, there was a strong and positive significant relationship between organizational reputation and trustworthiness of political parties in Rivers State ( $R= 0.908$ ,  $R^2=0.824\sim 82.4\%$ ). This reveals a strong and positive significant relationship between the two construct variables. Given the analysis output, probability value (0.000) is less than the level of significance, we rejected hypothesis one, that there is a significant impact of organizational reputation on trustworthiness of political parties in Rivers State. Hypothesis two ( $H_{02}$ ) also aimed at examining the relationship between organizational reputation and advocacy of political parties in Rivers State. The analysis outputs revealed same positive and strong significant relationship between organizational reputation and advocacy of political parties in Rivers State with Multiple Regression Analysis of 0.790 and coefficient of determination of 0.625~62.5% respectively. This reveals a strong and positive significant relationship between the two construct variables. Given the analysis output, probability value (0.000) is less than the level of significance, we rejected the hypothesis two, that there is was a significant impact of organizational reputation on advocacy of political parties in Rivers State.

Some empirical findings were in line with our findings on organizational reputation and public acceptance: Percy et al. (2013) results indicated that organizational reputation has a significant impact on firms' performance. Ladipo and Rahim (2013) found corporate reputation significantly impacted organization's success. Abd-El-Salam et al. (2013) result showed that there was a significant positive relationship between organizational reputation and customer acceptance which ultimately impacts on an organization's performance.

#### **Relationship between Brand Competence and Public Acceptance (trustworthiness and advocacy)**

Hypothesis three ( $H_{03}$ ) aimed at examine the significant relationship between brand competence and trustworthiness of political parties in Rivers State. The hypothesis was tested using Multiple Regression Analysis. Our analysis showed that, there was a strong and positive significant relationship between brand competence and trustworthiness of political parties in Rivers State ( $R= 0.908$ ,  $R^2=0.824\sim 82.4\%$ ). This reveals a



strong and positive significant relationship between the two construct variables. Given the analysis output, probability value (0.000) is less than the level of significance, we rejected the hypothesis three, that there is was a significant impact of brand competence on trustworthiness of political parties in Rivers State. Hypothesis four (Ho<sub>4</sub>) also aimed at examining the relationship between brand competence and advocacy of political parties in Rivers State. The analysis outputs revealed same positive and strong significant relationship between brand competence and advocacy of political parties in Rivers State with Multiple Regression Analysis of 0.832 and 0.790 and coefficient of determination of 0.625~62.5% respectively. This reveals a strong and positive significant relationship between the two construct variables. Given the analysis output, probability value (0.000) is less than the level of significance, we rejected the null hypothesis four because that there was a significant impact of brand competence on advocacy of political parties in Rivers State.

Some empirical findings were in line with our findings on organizational reputation and public acceptance: Hafeez and Essmail, (2007) study supported our findings that brand competence has a significant impact on customer acceptance. Chen et al. (2007) found that brand competence has positive and significant relationship with performance of an organization. Hussain et al. (2006) found that brand competencies in small manufacturing firms in Finland significantly correlated with business establishment's success.

## 5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The results on image management indicators, namely organizational reputation and brand competence, all contributed significantly towards achieving public acceptance (trustworthiness and advocacy) of political parties in Rivers State. In light of this, the study therefore concludes that:

- i) The findings revealed that organizational reputation significantly influence trustworthiness and advocacy of political parties in Rivers State.
- ii) Furthermore, brand competence significantly relates with trustworthiness and advocacy of political parties in Rivers State positively.

Based on the results, the study concluded that image management is strongly and positively relates with public acceptance of political parties in Rivers State as it creates a means of attachment with management which leads to public acceptance that most times leads to trustworthiness and advocacy.

Therefore, the following recommendations are put forward:

- 1) Political Parties should focus on other methods such as image management, communication, and marketing mix in order to increase political brand awareness and image among potential voters.
- 2) Political parties' leaders need to understand Rivers State's voters' perception and ideology for maximum acceptance. Thus, parties' leaders should keep conducting regular surveys to understand public needs and expectations of political parties.
- 3) Political parties should be open for reputable personalities to chair their affairs, with this, public acceptance objective could be met.
- 4) Political parties in Rivers State should consider organizational identity as a strategic weapon to outwit their oppositions.
- 5) Organizational identity should be incorporated into the operational and strategic plans of political parties. This includes brand logo, brand personification, brand image, brand reputation and corporate communication.

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