

Political Marketing and Voting Behaviour of Electorates in Rivers State

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Abstract: Political marketing and the voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State was examined empirically so as to give answers to the relationship existing between political product, political promotion and political price and the decision to participate in electioneering through voting. The correlational research design was adopted and a randomly selected population of electorates, which comprises of both partisans and non-partisans from four Local Government Areas in Rivers State. The sample of 160 electorates gave responses to questions on political product, political promotion, political pricing and voting behavior. The study found direct relationships between political product, political promotion and voting behavior. Also, the study revealed an inverse relationship between political price and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State. The study concluded that political marketing is one of the determinants of voting behavior of electorates. The recommendation reached was that, political parties should encourage her members and candidates to represent the party and her candidates in an image that will be good through effective representation, adoption of corporate citizenship behavior and adherence to honesty and justice as methods of building a strong political product so as to guide the electorates into making them as top priority in voting decisions.

Keywords: Political marketing, Political price, Political product, Political promotion, Voters behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The decision to vote, not to vote, how to vote, voting sentiments and biases, and the social actions to vote along party lines, religious affiliations, gender, races and so on and so forth forms what is known as voting behavior (Ozturk & Coban, 2019). The behaviors of voters are influenced by several factors, which ranges from social inclination to political biases, ethnic attachments to ideologies. The list that controls voters' behaviors are inexhaustible. Kofi and Ibanga (2018) noted that voters' behavior is a reflection of the individual voter's mindset, whether influenced or not, as every voting behavior is directly or indirectly controlled by our biases or sentiments.

Political parties as platforms for which politicians vie for elective positions in Nigeria, have the primary role of looking out for means by which the electorates can be swayed towards their party direction. Invariably, political parties seek means of controlling voting behaviors of the electorates that wishes to vote. It was along this premise that Mikidadi (2017) averred that voting behaviors are controlled by the societal voting attitudes, which is guided by past election activities. Irrespective of the various voting behavior influencers, political parties marketing strategy has a role to play (Newman, 2012).

Elections in Nigeria has been marred severally by thuggery, violence, vote buying, ethnicity and religion (Odojin & Omojuwa, 2007). Furthermore, they noted that these activities have made the Nigerian political seen to appear like an electoral process where governments just come and go without much influence on the decisions and behavior of voters on terms of voting. Voting is a form of political participation (Bartel, 2008), and this is affected by one's original predisposition, the personality of the candidate, and/or the his/her capabilities. One of the ways of influencing one's original predisposition or selling their personality to others is political marketing (Vite, Stephen, Gbimoie, & Kabee, 2020).

Gudmundsson, Hjalmarsdottir and Kristjansdottir (2019) assert that the importance of marketing techniques in political campaigning has increased as communicating politics has become more complicated in a highly fragmented media environment. The presentation of politicians, political parties, and the benefits one stands to gain from associating themselves with the political environment is known as political marketing. Political marketing focuses on market values, ideologies, and candidates of a political party in contrast to the conventional marketing of products and services in commercial organizations (Baines, 2012; Osuagwu, 2008). In political marketing, the marketing mix such as price, promotion, place and product, are proxies that are considered in line with politics. In political marketing, the product represents the political parties/candidates, promotion is political party and candidature adverts, price is what the electorates stands to sacrifice or pay in order to make the decision of who to vote or not to participate in the voting process (Osuagwu, 2008; Ghoshal, 2018).

Political parties campaign in Nigeria has usually sought out means to get the heart to the electorates so as to ensure that their candidates or parties' faithful get the desired election outcomes (Osuagwu, 2008). Endearing parties' candidature to the electorates due not just end in telling the people about their candidates, but they ensure that the marketing principles are applied in making known the caliber of persons the political party is fielding and what the electorates stand to gain from such choices (Baines, 2012). Based on this premise, it emphasizes the need for political parties to ensure they properly market their parties and its candidates.

During their lives, people make decisions from a variety of options, and these preferences could be based on a direct selection of a specific material component, advantage, or interest, or they could be based on a preference for a moral, ethical, philosophical, or intellectual problem (Şener, Balku, Alkan, Doru, Okudan Dernek, & Zenginoğlu, 2023). Through the calculation and aggregation of individual votes and preferences as well as the determination of the majority vote, people can make these decisions both individually and collectively. As a result, decision-making might appear in both public and private spheres. All of these voting and decision-making processes, regardless of the field in which they take place, are impacted by a variety of circumstances.

Omenugha, Ukwueze and Malizu (2011) in their research averred that Nigerian election drifted from the traditional to a better marketing perspective when social media became popularized. Furthermore, they noted that the political shift induced by social media, lead to strong political marketing conformity with the three-staged political marketing theory (Donovan, 2000). The electorates needs are sought for, and the candidates presented to the electorates promise the electorates needs. These candidates tell the electorates what will change if they are given the mantle to lead. To specify what they will deliver to the people. These, process is considered as political marketing. Therefore, this paper examined how political marketing can be used in driving

the desired voters' behavior using the electorates in Rivers State, Nigeria. The following formulated objectives, research questions and hypotheses gave direction and credence to this paper:

Objectives

1. Examine how candidates' personality (product) marketing relates to the voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. Determine the relationship between political party/candidates (promotion) adverts and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State.
3. Ascertain the relationship between the political price and their voting behavior as evident from electorates in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. How does candidates' personality marketing relate to the voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between political party/candidates adverts and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between the political price and their voting behavior as evident from electorates in Rivers State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Marketing

Political marketing has made consumers more powerful collectively and co-creators of public policies rather than just consumers, which is appropriate for politics to become more responsive to citizens' needs and demands, as that is the very essence of politics itself (Lees-Marshment, 2003; Scammell, 2014). Gbadeyan (2011) defines marketing as a process by which individuals or groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering and freely exchanging products and services of value with others. American Marketing Association (2017) defined marketing as the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large.

Political Marketing is the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organizations (Mohamed & Ogwuche, 2021). The use of marketing strategies, tactics, and instruments in the political process is known as political marketing (Menon, 2008). Furthermore, she stated it differently that, political marketing is the product of the union of marketing and politics. It is an activity and a tactic that illustrates how marketing is invading the political sphere. Some of the widely utilized techniques in political marketing include political advertising, celebrity endorsements, the use of expert consultants and campaign managers, online campaigning, mobile phone canvassing, segmentation, microtargeting, and more (Menon, 2008).

Political marketing is "the party or candidate's use of opinion research and environmental analysis to produce and promote a competitive offering which will help realize organizational aims and satisfy groups of electors in exchange for their votes" (Harris & Kolovos, 2004, 13). Lees-Marshment (2001:693), "political marketing is the outcome of the marriage between marketing

and politics and, empirically, and it represents the permeation of the political arena by marketing”. In her view, she added that this combination provides a more complete picture of the behavior of political parties.

According to Solfyan (2015), there are three advantages to political marketing that have an impact on democracy's well-being and strengthen the democratic system. First of all, voters have access to more information because to political marketing, which expands both the quantity and variety of information sources. The second advantage is that political marketing facilitates the development of the relationship between electorates and candidates, in the same way as political marketing serves as a model of exchange between the public and politicians that is comparable to that of producers and customers. Thirdly, the public has a plethora of options and sufficient knowledge to make an informed decision because of the political communication approach used in political marketing is voter-oriented.

Voting Behaviour

According to Oluwatula and Arogundade (2010), voter behavior is thought to fall into two main categories: voter preference and voter turnout. Voter turnout is really the percentage of individuals who attend the poll, but voter preference comprises the level of support or disapproval a voter has for a political party and the candidates running for political posts. Mahmud (2015) said that voting behavior relates to how voters vote and what influences their choices. Furthermore, he noted that Voter behavior is operationally measured by candidate preference and turnout. Voter behavior research includes voter preferences, voter turnout, and other related topics (Serna, 2018; Biereenu-Nnabugwu & Obiora, 2014).

More specifically, Gotfridus (2018:18) pointed out that research on voting behavior shows that voters select a pair of candidates based on one or more of the following factors: "candidate figureship, emotional connection, and geopolitical traits, which are the main factors influencing candidate choice". Additionally, it appears that party identification and political program are the two other criteria that have a strong correlation with voting behavior. "Voting behaviour is emphatically a function of myriad of interfacing and intervening variables that determine preference between competing candidates and political parties in an election" (Olayode, 2015, 18).

Voter behaviour as indicated by Agomor and Adams (2014) is characterised as a set of personal electoral activities, which include but not restricted to participation in electoral campaigns, turnout at the surveys and picking who to vote in favour for. The more an individual collaborates with other individuals, who share similar thoughts with him/her, the more probable they are to share same perspectives or same political behaviour are to share same political perspectives or the equivalent political behaviour (Evangelia & Theodore, 2017).

According to Robin (2011), voting behavior is a type of political engagement that describes the elements and practices through which a specific group of individuals engages in electoral activities. According to Oriavwote (2000), voting behavior can be defined as the procedure through which voters select candidates for state public office. In a liberal democratic society, voting behavior therefore serves as the primary means of electoral involvement. According to Aotearoa (2011), voting is the clearest and most direct approach for the general public (able-bodied or not) to influence public policy.

According to Zahida and Younis (2014), voting behavior is a collection of individual electoral acts, such as taking part in campaigns, showing up to vote, selecting a candidate to run against, and holding a campaign position. Voting behavior, according to Plano and Riggs (2005), is a component of political participation that focuses on the patterns of behavior and motivations behind people's choices in public elections. Voting behavior is one of the main types of political engagement that are always brought up in connection with elections and voting-related activities, according to Olaniyi (2004).

From the review of literature, the following conceptual framework was designed:

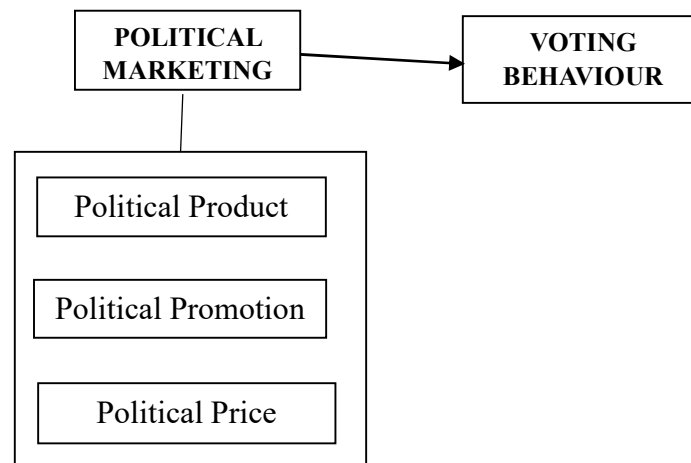


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework of the relationship between political marketing and voters' behaviour.

Source: Designed by the Researchers, 2024.

From the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypotheses

- H01:** Examine how candidates' personality (product) marketing relates to the voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State, Nigeria.
- H02:** Determine the relationship between political party/candidates' adverts (promotion) and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State.
- H03:** Ascertain the relationship between political price and the voting behaviors of electorates in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the correlational design was used. Studies that employ correlational statistics to find correlations between variables are referred to as having a correlational research design. A

correlational research strategy can be used to assess how closely two variables are connected. Correlational research, according to Creswell (2008), does not demonstrate a relationship; rather, it suggests an association between two or more variables. The components of a census that are easily available and typically quantified are called populations (Baridam, 2001). For this study, four local governments will be considered, Port Harcourt City, Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre LGA and Emohua LGA. The electorates in these Local Government Areas will be selected based on their ages, availability of voters' card and their localities. From each of the Local Government Areas (LGA), forty (40) electorates will be sampled as respondents. This amounted to a population of one hundred and sixty (160) respondents.

Table 1: The population distribution based on the investigated political parties as collected from the field.

S/N	Respondents	Non-Partisan Electorates	Partisan Electorates	Total
1	PHALGA	30	10	40
2	OBALGA	30	10	40
3	EMULGA	30	10	40
4	IKWERRE LGA	30	10	40
		120	40	160

Source: Field Data, 2024.

The researcher adopted the random sampling technique. "In the random sampling technique, the researcher deliberately selected the sampling units that will be included in the study because he feels they are representative of the target population" (Baridam, 2001, 35). It was only the primary source from which the information for this study was gathered and the research questionnaire is the key primary source. Retrieving the questionnaire group scores for each electorates and gathering answers to the questions about political marketing, voter behavior, political adverts, political pricing and political product were the main approaches for gathering data for this study. Simple and direct questions were used throughout the questionnaire, and complicated ones were avoided. The 5-point Likert scale is used to quantify the study's variables, including the predictor and criterion variables (5 being very high, 4 being high, 3 being moderate, 2 being low, and 1 being extremely low).

Predictor variable, which is political marketing was operationalized in political pricing, political adverts and political product, and these were measured against the criterion variable, which is voter behaviour. These variables had a total of 20 items: political product (5), political promotion (5), political pricing (5), and voter behaviour (5) items. The demographic questions had five (5) items. Each respondent was asked to complete a 25-item structured survey questionnaire. Data collected was coded, keyed in the computer and analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. The Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient statistics was the adopted inferential statistics which was used to test the formulated hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Decision rule: "The decision rule which applies for all bivariate test outcomes is stated as follows: where $P < 0.05$, reject hypothesis on the basis or evidence significant relationship; and where $P > 0.05$, accept hypothesis on the basis of insignificant relationship between the variables" (Ahaiauzu

& Asawo, 2016, 32). “The extent of influence is on this basis assessed using the rho interpretations provided” by Ahaiauzu and Asawo (2016:56) as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Description on Range of correlation (rho) values and the corresponding level of association

Range of r with positive and negative sign values	Strength of Association
± 0.80 – 0.99	Very Strong
± 0.60 – 0.79	Strong
± 0.40 – 0.59	Moderate
± 0.20 – 0.39	Weak
± 0.00 – 0.19	Very Weak

Source: Adopted from Ahaiauzu & Asawo (2016), *Advance Social Research Methods*

The values of (rho) with a positive (+) sign indicate a positive link, whereas those with a negative (-) sign suggest an indirect/negative or inverse relationship. The direction of association between the two variables is thus explained by the sign of the rho. The aforementioned table serves as our yardstick for assessing the degree of correlation between the dimensions' and measures' understudied variables. These relationships range from very weak to very strong as seen from Table 2

Table 3: Table showing correlation between political product and voter behaviour.

		Political_Product	Voting_Behaviour
Spearman's rho	Political_Product	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.689**
		N	.000
	Voting_Behaviour	Correlation Coefficient	160
		Sig. (2-tailed)	160
		N	.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data, 2024

With a rho value of 0.689, Table 3 demonstrates a significant and favorable correlation between political product and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State. This suggests that the correlation between the two variables is strong. As observed from the responses gathered from electorates in Rivers State, there is a significant positive correlation between political product and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State. However, the null hypothesis is rejected and its alternative form accepted because the probability statistics indicates a value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, at the 95% confidence interval for which the calculations were done. According to this, "political product and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State," is substantially correlated.

Table 4: Table showing correlations between political promotion and voter behaviour.

		Political_Promo	Voting_Behaviour
Spearman's rho	Political_Promo	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	160
	Voting_Behaviour	Correlation Coefficient	.734**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	160

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data, 2024

With a rho value of 0.734, table 4 demonstrates a significant and favorable association between political promotion and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State. This suggests that the correlation between the two variables is strong. As observed from the data provided in response by the electorates in Rivers State, there is a significant correlation between political promotion and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State. However, the null hypothesis is rejected and its alternative form accepted because the probability statistics indicates a value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, at the 95% confidence interval for which the calculations were done. By implication, "political promotion and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State," are strongly correlated.

Table 5: Table showing correlations between political price and voting behaviour.

		Political_Price	Voting_Behaviour
Spearman's rho	Political_Price	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	160
	Voting_Behaviour	Correlation Coefficient	-.715**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	160

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Research Data, 2024

With a rho value of -0.715, table 5 demonstrates a significant and favorable correlation between political price and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State. This suggests that the correlation between the two variables is negatively strong. As noted from the effect of political sensitization on what electorates will pay to gain their needed political stability in Rivers State, there is a high inverse correlation between political price and voting behavior of electorates. However, the null hypothesis is rejected and its alternative form accepted because the probability statistics indicates a value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, at the 95% confidence interval for which the calculations were done. By implication, " political price and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State," is highly correlated inversely.

Relationship between political product and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State.

There is a positive and significant relationship between political product and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State.

“To apply marketing principles to a political campaigns means that the campaign will understand the voter’s needs as in product marketing and develop a product to satisfy those needs” (Akinola

& Adekunle, 2022, 7). Andrei (2018) argues that political advertising is not a useful paradigm in an environment where confidence has been damaged. This is due to the fact that political advertising and other political marketing techniques become increasingly challenging when public trust is declining. This is because political advertisements lack credibility and are difficult for politicians to persuade the public of their goodness (Andrei, 2018). Furthermore, he noted that at such condition, the only political marketing mix that can work is selling the credibility of the candidates, which is the characteristics of the products itself.

In the political sphere, effective political marketers and politicians alike, foster relationships with their audience and the electorates by acting appropriately (positive behaviour) as well as by using the appropriate words (Stewart, Waller & Schubert, 2009). So, in addition to voter and candidate ideology, people's voting behavior and perceptions of the candidates' personalities may also be influenced by politicians' looks and nonverbal cues (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Consiglio, Picconi, & Zimbardo, 2003; Roets & Van Hiel, 2009). According to Bailenson, Iyengar, Yee, and Collins (2008), there is a voting probability and a congruence impact of the political product or the characteristics of the politician. Additionally, they observed that when both self- and observer-ratings of openness rise, so does the voting behavior for positivity. Thus, this research inferred that political product, which is in the form of political party good deeds or the good personality of the presented candidate has a resultant increase in the voters' behavior of the Rivers State electorates.

Relationship between political promotion and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State.

There is a positive and significant relationship between political promotion and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State.

Political advertising has been defined as a structured and composed non-personal communication, typically paid for and generally persuasive in nature, about products by revealing sponsors through a variety of media platforms (Arens, 2002; Arens et al., 2012). From this definition of political advertisement, the fundamental idea of such a campaign is that it is usually paid for, strongly persuasive and promote either an idea or a politician instead of promoting a product (Saleem et al., 2015). Abati (2010) and Opene (2012) argue that political messages advertised in the media influence those who exposed themselves to the messages during elections. However, some scholars have demonstrated that issues political parties presented to voters in the media have little or no effect on voters' preference of candidates during elections (Zumofen & Gerber, 2018). Therefore, this research infers that political promotion helps guide voters' behavior as seen from the electorates in Rivers State.

Relationship between political price and voter behavior of electorates in Rivers State.

There is a negative and significant relationship between political price and voting behavior of the electorates in Rivers State.

Research has shown that political values (price) play a significant and maybe increasing role in political thinking and decision-making (Knutsen & Kumlin 2005, Goren 2005, Ansolabehere *et al.* 2008). Nowadays, it is commonly acknowledged that fundamental political beliefs set the political price we attach to our voting behaviour, and as such, have a significant role in shaping political attitudes and actions (Jacoby 2006). A study by Schoen and Schumann (2007) demonstrates that personality traits, in addition to personal values; which are regarded as a core component of an individual's identity, which will influence our decisions on the associated political cost for our voting choices, and as such, have an effect on voting behavior that is mediated by political predispositions. Similarly, Braithwaite (1997) assumes that political attitudes only serve as an

indirect conduit via which fundamental principles impact voting behavior. Thus, this research inferred that the higher the political price, the lesser the electorates drift from their preferred choices to other alternatives. By implication, if the price that the electorates will pay in getting their preferred choices is much, they tend to allure to other options that are lesser in value as compared to what they first opted for.

CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings on the relationship between political marketing and voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State, Nigeria, it was affirmed that political marketing substantially contributes to the voting decision made by electorates in Rivers State. This position also builds on the observed correlation between the proxies of political marketing, and the various highpoints were reached. The study found that, political product which hinges on the credibility of the political party, its candidates, and their personalities, values and norms has a direct relationship with voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State, political promotion, represented in adverts, campaigns, and discussions is one of the drivers of voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State and political price which relates strategically to marketing a political party and its candidates, inversely relates to voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State. Political marketing is thus, a powerful determinant of voting behavior of electorates. The study therefore concludes that, political marketing significantly relates with voting behavior of electorates in Rivers State, and recommends that, political party/candidate marketing teams should:

- i. Encourage her members and candidates to represent the party and her candidates in an image that will be good through effective representation, adoption of corporate citizenship behavior and adherence to honesty and justice as methods of building a strong political product so as to guide the electorates into making them as top priority in voting decisions.
- ii. Advise the party candidates to adhere to the promotion of positive candidates' personality and party ideology through their campaigns and adverts so as to direct voters' decision towards the party and her candidates.

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