

## **BRAND PERSONALITY AND VOTER'S LOYALTY OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN RIVERS STATE.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper attempts to evaluate the relationship between brand personality and intention to voters' loyalty 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. 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. 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 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to test the hypothesis with the aid of SPSS. The results showed that political brand personality had a positive influence on voters' loyalty in Rivers State, Nigeria. It recommends that political parties should strive to maintain and sustain voters' loyalty through political brand association such as perception, experience, vigour, feelings and uniqueness.

***Keywords: Brand Personality, voter's loyalty, brand association, perceived quality.***

### **INTRODUCTION**

The emerging field of political marketing which is gradually taking roots in research is appraised by three disciplines communications, management, and political science (Scammell cit. in Gangloff, 2018). Political branding is within the field of political marketing and in the literature, it is an emerging way of thinking that connects several of scholarly approaches to expounding political department. A party brand can be said to embrace the party designation, logo, colour schemes and the party's history of policies and leaders while a candidate brand is the public image of a politician composed of the sum of all communications and impressions on a member of the denizen audience (Marland & Flanagan, 2013). Political brand is the political representations that are located in a pattern, which can be identified and differentiated from other political representations (Nielsen & Larsen, 2014). It is the overarching feeling, impression, association or image the public has towards a politician, political organisation, or nation. Political branding avails the party or candidate a platform to help change or maintain reputation and support, engender a feeling of identity with the party or its candidates and build a trusting relationship between political elites and consumers. It avails political consumers the opportunity to understand more expeditiously what a party or candidate stands for; and distinguishes a candidate or party from the competition (The University of Auckland, 2010). Political brands have three limpidly distinct elements: The party as the brand; the politician as its tangible characteristic and policy as core accommodation offering (O'Shaughnessy & Henneberg cit. in Smith & French, 2009).

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is expected that every political party should retain a significantly large number of voters in order to win and retain its electoral victory in every election. Currently, political parties in Rivers State are experiencing a seemingly growing challenge as to how to recruit and retain loyal voters

in the state. This is because voters are like customers, who when their needs and desires are met, will cultivate positive attitudes to the brand and shun defection, since it is very expensive to attract new voters. Again, voters can easily spread complaints about a party and this can lead to crises in the parties and ultimately to the electoral system of the state (Harris & Lock, 2010). Today, there is incessant defection of political party members and voters from one party to the other leading to fierce competition, fighting and violence in the state. The present situation sees even party stakeholders' defect from party to party to protect their personal interests without considering the impact of their actions to those they had referred to the party they are leaving. When candidates choose membership of a political party, there are reasons for their choice and for these candidates to retain their memberships of the parties, the parties concerned must work on the electorate to win their votes. This requires political parties devising strategies to make them electorally viable through brand-building and creation of brand personality which involves the human characteristics of the stakeholders, honest, integrity, trust and also paying attention to such things as party logo, slogan, programmes and electoral promises in order to appear attractive to potential voters and refer voters to the party.

**Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the study was to investigate the relationship between brand personality and voter loyalty. The specific objectives were to:

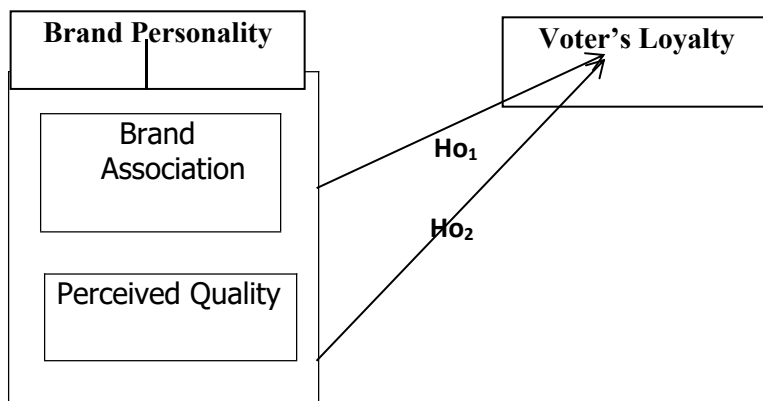
1. Determine the extent of relationship between brand association and voters' loyalty in Rivers States, Nigeria.
2. Examine the extent of relationship between perceived quality and voters' loyalty in Rivers State, Nigeria.

**Study variables and Research Framework**

Our study variable as a guide in the study, are brand personality (predictor variable) with its dimensions as brand association and perceived quality while voter's loyalty (criterion variable). Based on our research variables, this study is expressed in functional relationships noted below:

- BP = Brand Personality
- VL = Voter's Loyalty
- BA = Brand Association
- PQ = Perceived Quality

**Operational Framework of the Study**



**Table 1:** Operational framework of the Relationship between brand personality and voter's loyalty in Rivers State.

**Source:** Desk Research, 2021.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions were answered:

1. To what extent does political brand association influence voters' loyalty in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between perceived quality and voters' loyalty in Rivers State, Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested:

- Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between political brand association and voters' loyalty to vote in Rivers State.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between perceived quality and voters' loyalty in Rivers State.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Brand Personality**

The notion of brand personality results from the transfer of the personality concept from individual psychology to the marketing context (Opoku & Pitt, 2007). Brand personality can be viewed from diverse perspectives from different authorities and as a concept, it is distinctive (Rutter Hanretty & Lettice, 2015). Brand personality is the set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997); it is measured with ruggedness, competence, sophistication, sincerity and excitement (Igwe, 2019). While Azoulay & Kapferer (2003) assert that brand personality is the set of human personality traits that are both applicable to and pertinent for brands, Sweeney & Brandon (2006) view it from the interpersonal circumflex model and define it as the set of human personality traits that correspond to the interpersonal domain of human personality and pertain to describing the brand as a relationship partner. The consequence of brand personality in marketing cannot be overemphasised since it plays a vital role in understanding brand choice, is invaluable in building brand equity, plays a role in growing consumer predilection for and utilisation of the brand, enables the consumers differentiate among the myriad products available in the marketplace and helps the consumer to express his or her own self (Anandkumar & George, 2011). In fact, brand personality entails brand traits (Plummer, 2000). As an expanded concept, brand personality has been categorised as functional and expressive (Okazaki, 2006); it ties into the congruency of brand allegiance, brand association, product preference and the consumption of products congruent with a consumer's self-image (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Kumar, Luthra & Datta, 2006; Seetharan, Nadzir & Gunalan, 2001). The efficacy of the personal brand endorsement of a party is predicated on the accidence between perceptions of the brand personality of the individual and the desire to associate with the party (influences and impacts of personal brand and political brand bi-directional endorsement).

#### **Brand Association**

Keller (1993) uses brand association in terms of strength, favourability and uniqueness, as measures of brand equity, with the vigour describing how many associations the party brings to mind. Favourability considers the positivity/negativity of these associations. Brand Association entails the perceptions engendered in the mind of voters about a political party; it is the main key to recalling and recognition of a political party (Ahmed *et al*, 2015). Brand association of a political party is the main factor that determines the perceptions of brand quality (French & Smith, 2010). Uniqueness, as posited by Krishnan (1996), is measured as the proportion of associations that are unique to the brand as compared to the competition.

Speed, Butler & Collins (2015) as well as O’Cass & Voola (2010), maintain that political brand equity explores brand personality, brand images, brand identity and human branding, politicians, brand orientation and political leadership. Brand association includes notions, beliefs, experiences, images, perceptions, attitudes and feelings which are present in the memory, of a brand (Ashraf, Sulehri, & Abbas, cited in Keller & Lehmann, 2006). Optically discerned, brand association is said to be more vigorous whenever voters have positively linked them in their recollection to the brand (Aaker, 1991).

### **Perceived Quality**

Quality is a set of features and characteristics of a service or product which provides contentment to the desideratum of consumers (Dooster, Abadi & Abach, 2012). Perceived quality can be viewed as how consumers evaluate the brand in terms of brand designation, performance, durability and the overall excellence of the brand (Kirmani & Banmgarther, 2000). The perceived quality of the political brand influences directly, voters’ adhesion and their voting choices and patterns.

Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) quantify perceived quality utilising the following dimensions: Reliability (the faculty to perform or carry out any promised accommodation to the masses consumers), Credibility (the quality of being honest, trustworthy and tenable), Security (concerned with the safety of the consumer from hazards), and Communication (has to do with the parties heedfully discerning the consumer through having an interaction with them. The perceived quality of the political party influences voters’ partisan adhesion loyalty directly and their voting demeanour (French & Smith, 2010).

### **Criterion Variable-Voters’ Loyalty**

The focus of every political party is to build and maintain voters’ loyalty in order to have sustainable competitive advantage over the opposition (Nwiepe & Grend, 2019). Voter loyalty is measured using behavioural and attitudinal adhesion voters that are behaviourally loyal to a political brand, reiterate buying behaviour, and vote the same political party (Needham, 2006). Attitudinal voters’ allegiance refers to having a concrete commitment to a political party, followed by a strong likelihood of choosing the party over and over in elections (Mishra & Mishra, 2014). Voters’ allegiance is their commitment to the political party which prompts them to vote the same party during elections (Bose & Rao, 2011). Brand loyalty specifically refers to consumers’ constant patronage of a brand despite competition or opposition’s superior features and prices, which should be an advantage (Agbaiza, Zuberu & Mojekeh, 2019).

### **Brand Personality and Voters’ Loyalty**

Brand personality has insinuation for both consumers and brands because it leads to repeat purchase and keeps the business successful. It is critical because customer loyalty is needed to have a prosperous business (Agbaiza, Zuberu & Mojekeh, 2019; Igwe, 2019). Riet, (2010), measured voters’ loyalty in terms of combination of attitudinal and behavioural. Furthermore, he viewed voters into two groups which are habitual voters and high- involvement voters. Habitual voters’ loyalty can be increased by creating brand awareness, they engaged in low- involvement, repetitive voting behaviour while the high-involvement voters are not so much affected by brand awareness which in turn respond more to a strong brand image. Furthermore, in the event of an intra-party disagreement and dissatisfaction, the choice that voters make depends on their degree of loyalty to their party. If they are very loyal, such as the dye-in-the wool Democrat or the faithful Mustang enthusiast, they will prolyl delay exiting until they have exhausted every possible attempt to change things by raising their voice (Sodaro, 2006). If their loyalty to the part is not

great, they will likely exit the party early. Sodaro, (2006) averred that too much loyalty to a political party provides its leaders with no incentive to improve its candidates or ideas, thereby risking its continuing deterioration. Sometimes a party listen to its followers only when they begin deserting the polls. Voters push to express their support or dissatisfaction in the party is a strong indication of loyalty to a party but when they begin to leave the poll, it sends a negative signal to the leaders of the party that their mistake are ruining the party.

### **Aaker's Brand Equity Model**

This study is anchored on Aaker brand equity theory reasons being that Aaker, views brand equity as a set of five categories of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or to that firm's customers (Srivastava, 2015). These categories of brand assets are brand allegiance, brand cognisance, perceived quality and brand associations. Other proprietary assets include patents, trademarks and channel relationships. According to Aaker (1996), a categorically consequential concept for building brand equity is brand identity - the unique set of brand associations that represent what the brand stands for and promises to customers. The brand identity consists of twelve(12) dimensions organised around four (4) perspectives:

- i. Brand-as-product (product scope, product attributes, quality/value, uses, users, country of origin);
- ii. Brand-as-organisation (organisational attributes, local versus universal);
- iii. Brand-as-person (brand personality, brand-customer relationships);
- iv. Brand-as-symbol (visual imagery/metaphors and brand heritage).

Also, Aaker (1996) conceptualises brand identity as including a core and elongated identity. The core identity - the central, timeless essence of the brand - is most likely to remain constant as the brand travels to new markets and products. The elongated identity includes sundry brand identity elements, organised into cohesive and meaningful groups. It is very important to anchor this work on this Aaker's theory since the study is on brand equity and looking at all the dimensions of the political brand equity, it is paramount theory be employed.

### **Empirical Review**

Valette-Florence, Guizani & Merunka (2011) undertook a study on the impact of brand equity in France, focusing on coffee, athletic shoes and cars. The title of the journal is the impact of brand personality and sales promotions on brand equity. They accumulated data from 538 students and university staff. Their findings revealed a positive effect in brand personality on brand equity while sales promotion had a negative effect.

Ahmed, Lodhi & Ahmad (2015) carried out a study on political brand equity model titled political brand equity model; the integration of political brands in voter choice. The model demonstrated the integration of political brands in voter choice using a sample size of 530 from whom valid responses were drawn in District Gujrat, Pakistan. The researchers selected two political parties in Pakistan: Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) and Pakistan Tehreek -e- Insaf (PTI). The analysis of the responses through structural equation modeling methodology demonstrated that political parties vary according to the outcomes of their role in the political socialisation process of the communities, loyalty and voters' attitude. The study which used constructs of party knowledge, party awareness, party association and party image, had findings which showed that parties with favourable roles in the socialisation process, have strong party knowledge and high party equity.

Ogbuji, Onuoha & Owhorchukwu (2016) investigated brand personality and marketing performance of deposit money banks in Port Harcourt, Nigeria; questionnaire was administered on all nineteen consolidated banks in Port Harcourt through the bank managers, marketing heads, customer care officers and sales heads. The result showed that brand personality creates a means of attachment with customers leading to customer loyalty and ultimately most times, resulting in

sales growth and profitability. The result showed that brand personality has a positive and significant effect on the brand equity that points out the direct and indirect effect on the customers purchase intention and brand equity has a positive mediating role which can improve the brand personality effect on the customers purchase intention.

Farhat & Khan (2011) undertook a study entitled Importance of brand personality to customer loyalty: A conceptual study. The results showed that brand personality not only plays a crucial role in customer retention, but also has a profound influence on a company's performance; in other words, a prosperous brand requires the building of a distinct brand personality.

**METHODOLOGY**

In this study, our focus is an investigation of how political brand personality affects voters' loyalty 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 the study population (3,215,273) of registered voters from twenty-three (23) Local Government Areas in Rivers State, using the Taro Yamane formula.

Similarly, since it was difficult to access and study all the population elements, cluster sampling technique was applied to retrieve data from the respondents in the following areas of the state: Bori, Port Harcourt, Rumuokoro, Emohua, Abalama, Abonnema, Ahoada, Ataba, Bonny, Buguma, Igwuruta, Nkoro, Okirika, Omoku, Onne, Opobo, Bane, Bodo, Elele, Isiokpo, Odiabidi, Okobie. The purposive and availability sampling techniques were further used to administer the questionnaire on the respondents in the selected voting units in the selected clusters, who were 18 years and above, were members of the political parties in Rivers State and who voted in the 2019 elections.

A population-to-ratio formular was used to allocate questionnaire to each local government area using each local government area's numerical strength, registered number of voters and the study sample size. A 5-point Likert Scale was adopted with a rating scale of five (5) options of Strongly Agree (SA) = 5, Agree (A) = 4, Undecided (U) =3, Strongly Disagree (SD) = 2, Disagree (D) =1.

Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between political brand equity and voters' loyalty by considering the dimensions of political brand equity. This tool was used in analysis because its test association and data are in ordinal scale. SPSS was used to test the strength of correlation between the independent variable - Political brand equity and the dependent variable - voters' Loyalty. This tool was used because the variables were measured in ordinal scale and specifically, the tool measures relationship/association.

**Table 3.1: Registered voters in Rivers State for the 2019 elections**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA</b>	<b>TOTAL REGISTERED VOTERS</b>
1.	Port Harcourt city	485, 238
2.	Obio/Akpor	600,622
3.	Ikwerre	151,390
4.	Andoni	131, 551
5.	Oyibo	109.095
6.	Eleme	117,332
7.	Opobo/ Nkoro	52,069

8.	Bonny	74, 249
9.	Okrika	79, 018
10.	Akuku-Toru	106,562
11.	Omuma	60,662
12.	Tai	71,519
13.	Ahoada East	82,858
14.	Emohua	124,080
15.	Etche	119,572
16.	Ogba/Egbema/ Ndoni	152,163
17.	Ogu/ Bolo	54,569
18.	Asari –Toru	83,727
19.	Degema	90,330
20.	Khana	167,958
21.	Ahoada west	83,062
22.	Abua /Odual	88,561
23.	Gokana	129,086
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,215,273</b>

**Source: INEC (2019)**

### Data Presentation and Analysis

#### Test of Hypothesis One

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between political brand personality and voters’ loyalty.

**Table 4.1: Relationship between Political Brand Association and Voters’ Loyalty Correlations**

		Political Brand Association	Voters’ Loyalty
Political Brand Association	Pearson Correlation	1	.899**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	363	363
Voters’ Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.899**	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**

From Table 4.19, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.899 while the p value is 0.000; the coefficient of determination is 0.808 representing 80.8%. This shows that there exists a strong and positive association between political brand association and voters’ loyalty; hence the H<sub>01</sub> that there is no significant relationship between political brand association and voters’ loyalty is rejected, since p value (0.000) is less than 0.05. Conclusion: Political brand association exerts a significant influence on voters’ loyalty.

**Test of Hypothesis Two**

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between perceived quality and voters’ loyalty

**Table 4.2: Relationship between Perceived quality and Voters’ Loyalty**  
**Correlations**

		Perceived Quality	Voters’ loyalty
Perceived Quality	Pearson Correlation	1	.898**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	363	363
Voters’ Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.898**	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**

From Table 4.23, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.898 while the p value is 0.000; the coefficient of determination is 0.806 representing 80.6%. This shows that there exists a strong and positive association between perceived quality and voters’ loyalty in Rivers State; hence the H<sub>02</sub> that there is no significant relationship between perceived quality and voters’ loyalty is rejected, since p value (0.000) is less than 0.05. Conclusion: Perceived quality has a significant influence on voters’ loyalty.

**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 hypothetical statement claimed that political brand association was not significantly related to voters’ loyalty. However, the results revealed the existence of a strong and significant relationship between political brand association and voters’ loyalty (R = 0.899 & 0.845; R<sup>2</sup> = 0.808 & 0.714 ~ 80.8% & 71.4% for Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Regression, respectively.

In summary, these results revealed that political brand association had a positive influence on voters’ loyalty in Rivers State, Nigeria, considering the probability value which is less than the stated level of confidence (Pv<0.05), the null hypotheses were rejected. The reason for positive correlation could be attributed to the fact that most respondents agreed that the items on brand association could assert positive change on their loyalty attitude.

The hypothetical statement in (H<sub>02</sub>) intended to examine the extent of relationship between perceived quality and voters’ loyalty. The output indicated that a significant relationship exists between the two variables (R = 0.898 & 0.845; R<sup>2</sup> = 0.806 & 0.714 ~ 80.6% & 71.4% for both Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Regressions.

In summary, these results showed that perceived quality had a positive influence on voters’ loyalty in Rivers State, Nigeria, considering the probability value which is less than the stated level of confidence (Pv<0.05).

## **CONCLUSION**

The results of the findings on the dimensions of political brand personality, namely, political brand association, and perceived quality all contribute significantly towards achieving voters' loyalty 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' loyalty in Rivers State.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Political parties should ensure sustainable voters' loyalty by ensuring that their chosen candidates are acceptable in terms of ruggedness, sophistication, integrity and excitement.
- Political parties should focus on other methods like promotional activities through adequate publicity through the mass media, grassroots mobilisation and marketing mix, to increase political brand awareness and image, among potential voters.
- Political parties should strive to maintain and sustain voters' loyalty through political brand association such as perception, experience, vigour, feelings and uniqueness.

## **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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