
POLITICAL BRAND IDENTITY AND VOTERS' PATRONAGE TOWARDS POLITICAL PARTIES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the correlation between political brand identity and voters' patronage towards political parties in Rivers State. The study employed a cross-sectional survey, which is a type of quasi-experimental design, to assess the study's research elements. The study's population comprises 52 registered Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Rivers State. Data collected from this procedure were examined, and a total of 4 hypotheses were evaluated using Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient. Findings showed a clear and meaningful association between the dimensions of political brand identity (party culture and party relationship) and the measures of voter patronage (voters' satisfaction and voters' referral). This correlation was positive and statistically significant. It was based on this finding, the study concluded that Party culture and relationship are veritable marketing and political instruments that may be utilised to enhance voter patronage. The study's recommendations suggest that political parties and their candidates should focus on cultivating and sustaining enduring relationship values, strong positive ideologies, and consistent messaging in order to enhance voter patronage. This is in line with fulfilling electioneering promises and be consistent with party conducts in tune with both party constitution and that of the nation.

Keywords: Political Brand Identity, Brand Culture, Voters' Referral.

Introduction

The political history of Nigeria has seen significant transformations, starting with the era of military control to the present democratic administrations (Glory & Agnes, 2016). However, this is caused by many military coups and the establishment of democratic governance in 1999. The significant change in the political history of the country and the need to improve our election procedures are some of the key factors that have attracted the attention of many researchers and practitioners in this field.

Essentially, the idea of viewing political parties as brands has become a topic of discussion and is a result of the widespread use of branding. Presently, branding tactics have emerged as crucial instruments for political leaders to position their parties in the political marketplace in order to achieve a good conclusion. Henneberg (2016) contends that the branding notion is now being utilised more frequently in the political arena, namely when voters choose which party to support. Furthermore, Needham (2015) said that branding concepts have been implemented in nearly every context where individuals (consumers or voters) are engaged in a decision-making process to select among several options (products or political parties). Therefore, similar to how corporate organisations gradually establish their brand identity, political party leaders have recognised the need of strategically placing their parties in the minds of voters.

Gnooth, Franklin & Richardon (2007) contended that the brand culture associated with a political party could effectively differentiate it and establish the desired image and identity, thereby influencing voters' satisfaction and support. This, in turn, enhances the likelihood of winning elections. Newman (2002) said that party leaders have the ability to utilise distinct values and culture that align with their identity, together with their long-lasting emotional connections with voters. The author proceeded to delineate party identity as the distinct collection of connections and perception that party strategists aim to establish and uphold. Aaker (1996) emphasised party plans and manifestoes, the distinctive characteristics of the candidate, and the general perception of the party when considering party identity. He asserted that the strategic amalgamation of the aforementioned three components may facilitate the party's triumph in the elections.

Several studies have been conducted in the field of brand identity, with a focus on product branding. These studies examine various aspects such as brand name, mark or sign, design or colour, and other distinguishing factors including packaging and labelling (Aaker, 1996; Augustine & Singh, 2005; De-Chernatony, 2007; Keller, 2003; Nandam, 2015; Mittal, Rose & Baldasare, 2008). Essentially, the aforementioned research were based on corporate philosophy. Nevertheless, this study specifically examined the concept of political branding, which originated from social marketing. In this context, political parties are viewed as goods, and voters are regarded as consumers. This field of research has arguably been given little attention; hence, there is a need to investigate it. Furthermore, it is worth noting that although political marketing scholars have paid limited attention to party identity, none of these studies have incorporated both party culture and relationship as dimensions of party identity. Additionally, this study was limited to political parties in Rivers State. It was against this backdrop to bridge the identified gap that this study empirically investigated the correlation between political brand identity and voters' patronage of political parties in Rivers State.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's status as an independent nation is marked by a history of political instability. Since gaining independence in 1960, the nation has faced significant challenges in establishing a functional and long-lasting democracy. The current political situation is characterised by a consistent inability to hold fair and transparent elections, where citizens have sufficient access to enforceable and well-protected opportunities to exercise their right to vote for their preferred leaders. As a result, the goal of achieving a sustainable democracy has largely been elusive, leading to low levels of political participation and favouritism.

Various methods have been implemented in the past to tackle these challenges, including the adoption of electronic transmission of results, voter education initiatives by INEC, awareness programs by Civil Society Organisations, and intervention programs by concerned organisations. Nevertheless, these methods have failed to achieve the intended outcome in terms of voter contentment, endorsement, and dedication.

This study suggests that political brand identity might be used as a potential way to solve these difficulties, based on the underlying principle. This study investigated the correlation between political brand identity and voter patronage towards political parties in Rivers State.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Brand Architectural Theory (BAT)

The research was based on the Brand Architectural Theory (BAT). The premise of BAT relies on the organisational framework of the units inside an enterprise. The text elucidates the hierarchical framework of an organization's operational culture (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2002). Kapferer (2004) argues that Brand Architecture Theory (BAT) emphasises the interplay between different goods within a brand and their respective markets, with the goal of creating a clear and consistent perception in the minds of the target audience. This endeavour is pursued to guarantee a synergistic performance across all product categories. Riezebos (2003) argues that BAT involves regularly evaluating and reorganising an organization's Strategic Business Units (SBU) to define roles and responsibilities and provide a structure for achieving organisational success. This approach is especially applicable to companies that have various strategic business units (SBUs) or a portfolio of products. Its purpose is to advocate and promote a uniform image throughout its diverse markets.

In the context of party politics, although there is less literature on the subject, it is believed that political parties may be seen as brands with strategic business units (SBUs) or goods that are evaluated and assessed by many stakeholders, including the public. From a political marketing standpoint, PBAT elucidates the connection between a political party, its candidates, and policies. Ugglä (2005) argues that in order to achieve electoral success, political parties must effectively handle many political elements such as party activities, candidates, programs, policies, and manifestos. Political parties must establish connections and collaborate with various groups, organisations, and stakeholders involved in the election process. Consequently, parties are required to promote themselves to these groups and stakeholders (Baer, 2000). The author also mentioned that the consequence of PBAT is to

consistently restructure the organisation and responsibilities of political entities in order to meet the needs of various political players in the political marketplace.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

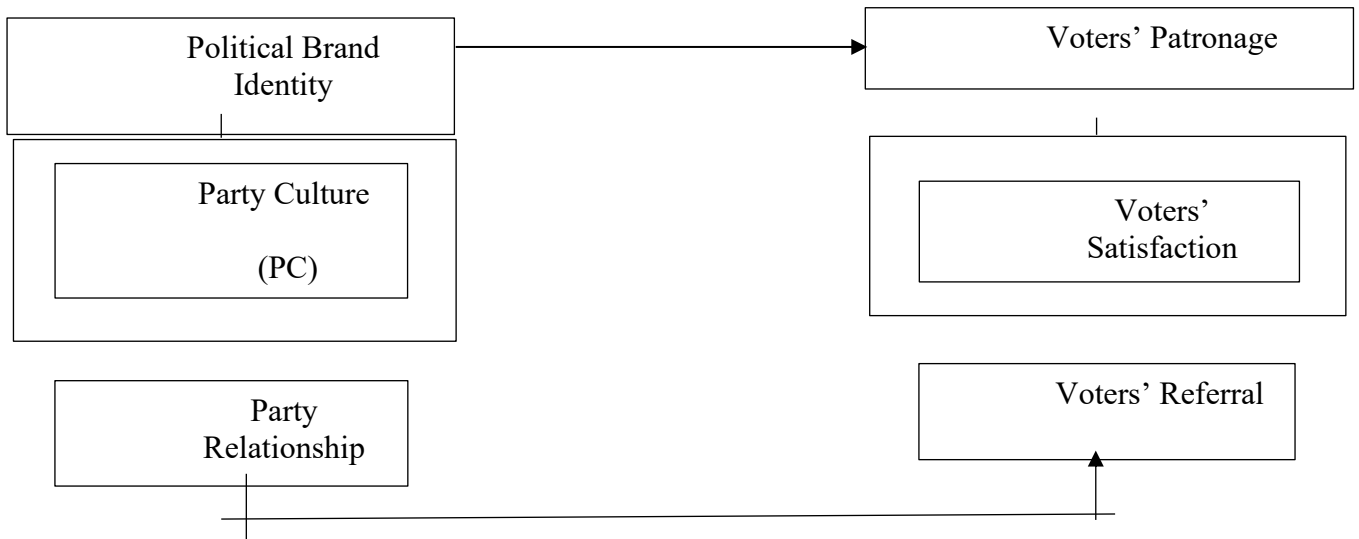


Fig. 2.1:

Fig. 1.1: Conceptual Framework of the Association between Political Brand Identity and Voters' Patronage

Source: De Chernatony, 2007; Ahmed, LLoth & Ahmad, 2015; Scammel, 2007.

2.2.1 Concept of Political Party Identity

The notion of party identity originates from brand identity. The former is examined via a political lens, while the latter is seen through the lens of the corporate sector. Nandam (2005) defines party identity as the distinct collection of associations and image that party strategists aim to establish and uphold. Aaker (1996) defines party identity as the combination of party policies and manifestoes, the distinctive characteristics of the candidates, and the general perception of the party. Nandam (2005) contended that party identity is considered a valuable method for acquiring a more profound comprehension of the internal mechanisms of a political party. The internal mechanisms can be compared, for instance, to the process of selecting party delegates for internal elections, the emergence of party candidates in primary elections, and the appointment of members to positions of trust. Internal democracy is seen as a distinctive characteristic that a successful party should be recognised for. According to Kapferer (2004), party identity refers to the intentional connections envisioned by party strategists. Identity involves conveying the party's values, beliefs, and principles to the broader population.

Examining political parties from an identity standpoint shows that parties with a strong sense of identity are viewed by voters as more authentic and reliable (Harris & De-Chernatony, 2001; Nandam, 2005). Furthermore, the notion of party identity establishes a differentiation between the intended meanings of a message by the political party (source) and how this

message is interpreted by voters (Foreling & Forbes, 2005). They furthermore said that party identity pertains to the orientation, objective, and significance of a political party in relation to the perspectives of party strategists. According to De-Chernatony (2007), party identity is an intricate and diverse concept. Nevertheless, the author emphasised that identity revolves around the core concepts that define a party and how this notion is enhanced and maintained throughout time.

2.2.1.1 Party Culture

The political party culture refers to the collection of ideals that provide the party with inspiration and serve as the source of their operations (Kapferer, 2008). In order to enhance communication with voters and reduce misconceptions, Kapferer (2008) emphasises the need of political parties developing their own distinct culture, from which all their programs should stem. Sääksjärvi and Samiee (2011) assert that cultural values are fundamental principles that shape individuals' perceptions of themselves and others. Furthermore, it is emphasised that political party strategists should see party culture as a primary asset, as it has the potential to enhance the party's competitive advantage in engaging with voter markets (Sääksjärvi and Samiee, 2011). Kapferer (2008) and Schmidt et al. (1995) emphasise that culture establishes a connection between party candidates and the party, while also accentuating the distinguishing qualities that set it apart from competitors. Kapferer (2008) argues that these distinguishing characteristics of the culture might pertain to the fundamental concepts guiding the party's visible indications, such as manifestos, programs, and activities.

2.2.1.2 Party Relationships

In the realm of politics, Sääksjärvi and Samiee (2011) define relationship as the dynamic interplay between voters' sentiments towards a political party and the party's sentiments towards the voters. Voters' perspective significantly influences party communication. Kapferer (2008) emphasises the need of political parties including the aspect of interpersonal relationships into its candidates in order to achieve success in the electoral process. Harris & De-Chernatony (2001) argue that party strategists should engage candidates with the electorates to establish a compelling relationship between them. Kapferer (2008) and Lannon and Harris & De-Chernatony (2001) concur that it is crucial for political parties to serve as the primary source of communication for the voters. Nandam (2005) stated that voters tend to develop strong connections with political parties that share comparable principles and personality traits with their own self-concept. Political parties must align their actions, achievements, and interactions with the preferences of the people, and political strategists should take this into account while interacting with the public. According to Kapferer (2008), all aspects of communication, including pictures and symbols, should be connected to and take use of the values and lifestyles of voters. In addition, De Chernatony (1999) elucidated that a strong connection and heightened engagement between political parties and voters may enhance the candidates' inventiveness and success. This is because the political party gains a deeper comprehension of the people.

2.2.2 Voters' Patronage

The notion of patronage has been extensively studied by researchers in both commercial and political fields, particularly in the literature on consumer and voter behaviour (O'Cass, 2002; Kotler, 2003; Engel, Blackwell & Mniard, 1990; Rachmat, 2014; Oliver, 2000; Mittal, et al., 2008). Kotler (2003) argues that political brands should use the commercial approach to increase voter loyalty. In addition, he emphasised the need of political parties comprehending the desires and ambitions of voters and then developing and refining services (such as policies and programs) in order to better meet those wants and aspirations, surpassing the efforts of their rivals in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. Furthermore, it is crucial for party strategists to comprehend the process of voting decision-making and accurately identify the primary factors that impact voter choice and loyalty.

In addition, O'cass (2002) defined patronage as the act of exercising electoral franchise by voting for a certain political party, focussing on its political implications. He further asserted that the notion of voter patronage is a cognitive process that mirrors the electorate's inclinations towards a particular political party. In addition, Engel et al. (1990) argued that as voters assess different political parties, they develop intentions to take action, leading to voter patronage. The author also said that a favourable political brand image results in a rise in voter support and, subsequently, improved election outcomes. In conclusion, he emphasised the importance of political parties prioritising the development of their political brand image and identity, since these factors significantly impact voter support and decision-making.

2.2.3 Political Party Identity and Voters' Patronage

In their study, Ahmed, et al. (2015) discovered that a political party that successfully impresses its stakeholders, including the voter, is more likely to achieve a favourable position in the political market, sustain a competitive advantage, and improve its electoral performance. Furthermore, according to Popkin (1999), party culture not only creates an impression, but also elicits emotional responses from voters and appeals to their conscience in order to achieve a good conclusion. Keller (2003) found that there is a positive correlation between party relationship and increased loyalty and word-of-mouth referral. The author stated that voters often align themselves with parties that possess consistent ideas and have the political determination to fulfil campaign pledges. Parties that engage in the aforementioned actions are likely to possess a substantial support base and emerge triumphant in elections.

French & Smith (2010) conducted research on the assessment of political brand identification using a voter-centric perspective. The objective of their research was to provide a framework for comprehending the way in which voters view political parties. To do this, the study utilised consumer learning theory as its foundational framework. It employed a proven empirical approach to create a consumer-centric framework for mapping political parties. The study offers intriguing insights into the political identities of conservative and labour parties. The analysis emphasised key characteristics of each political party, including their philosophy, structure, culture, and affiliations that make up the electoral landscape. The findings indicate a significant association between political brand identification and voter

choice for a party. The analysis also showed that although both political parties have significant brand equity, the conservative party has a higher level of equity compared to the labour party.

In their study, Pich and Dean (2015) conducted an analysis of political branding, specifically focussing on the brand identity prism of the UK conservative party. The study specifically analysed the utilisation of Kapferer's (2008) brand identity prism in relation to political parties, focussing on the conservative party's equity. The study extended the application of the brand identity prism to a political brand identity network, which encompasses the party's philosophy, organisation, and the personality of its candidate. The study revealed that political brand identification strongly influences voters' decision-making process, indicating a potential method for effectively communicating a party's distinctive characteristics to voters in order to achieve favourable results.

In addition, Ahmed, et al. (2015) conducted a study on political brand equity, which examines how political brands influence voter choice. The study established a political brand identification model grounded on three components. The factors encompassed are the actions of political parties, the connection between parties and stakeholders, and the attitude of voters towards parties and their candidates. The study further identified distinctive party attributes by analysing the function of political parties in enhancing democracy and their impact on voters' selection of parties. The research's model was experimentally validated by collecting 550 valid replies from the study respondents in District Gujrat, Pakistan. Upon thorough analysis of the different replies, it was shown that the dimensions of political brand identification, specifically party culture and affiliation, exhibit a robust and favourable correlation with the selection made by the electorates. Additionally, it was shown that political parties had certain characteristics, which they often utilise while creating equity maps.

Rachmat (2014) investigated the influence of political brand trust on voting intention in the 2013 North Maluku Governorship Election. The study specifically analyses three factors that influence confidence in political brands: reputation, honesty, and familiarity. The objective is to determine how these factors affect voting intention. Upon analysing the replies of respondents, the results indicated a significant link between political brand trust and voting intention. It also shown that although the integrity of candidates is crucial in establishing trust, voters mostly rely their voting decisions on the integrity of the political party rather than the familiarity with the individuals.

Finally, Pich & Armannsdottir (2015) conducted a study on the political brand image, specifically focusing on how the external orientation of David Cameron's conservative brand was measured. The study explicitly examined how the six elements that make up the brand image framework are applied to the political context and how they influence voting behaviour. The foundation for political brand image consists of six variables: strength, originality, expectation, perception, experience, and assessment. The findings indicate that the party's power, distinctiveness, and expertise exert a more significant impact on voting preference compared to the other factors. Nevertheless, all factors had a favourable correlation with voting behaviour.

Based on the above postulates, the following hypotheses were proposes:

- H01:** Party culture has no significant relationship with voters' satisfaction of political parties in Rivers State.
- H02:** Party culture has no significant relationship with voters' referral of political parties in Rivers State.
- H03:** Party relationship has no significant relationship with voters' satisfaction of political parties in Rivers State.
- H04:** Party relationship has no significant relationship with voters' referrals of political parties in Rivers State.

2.3 Empirical Review

Table 2.1 Summary of Empirical Review

S/N	Author(s) and year of publication	Research Tittle	Findings
1.	French & Smith (2010)	Measurement of political brand identity from a voter oriented approach.	Evidence demonstrates a significant association between political brand identification and voter preference for a certain party. The analysis also showed that although both political parties had significant brand equity, the conservative party has a greater level of equity compared to the labour party.
2.	Pich & Dean (2015)	The examination of political branding: An investigation of brand identity prism to the UK conservative party.	The findings indicated that the political brand identity had a substantial influence on voters' decision-making process. Therefore, the study provided evidence of a viable method for effectively expressing a party's distinctive attributes to voters, resulting in favourable outcomes.
3.	, Ahmed, et al. (2015)	Investigation of political brand equity: an integration of political brands in voter choice.	The investigation discovered that the attributes of political brand identification, specifically party culture and affiliation, are strongly and positively correlated with the preferences of voters. Additionally, it was shown that political parties had certain characteristics, which they often utilise while creating equity maps.
4.	Rachmat (2014)	This study investigates the influence of political brand trust on voting intention by analysing the 2013 North Maluku Governorship Election.	Research has shown that there is a significant relationship between the level of confidence in a political brand and an individual's desire to vote for that brand. The study also indicated that although the integrity of candidates is crucial in establishing trust, voters mostly rely their voting choices on the integrity of the political party rather than the familiarity with the individuals.
5.	Pich & Armannsdottir (2015)	Analysed the political brand image: a study on how the exterior orientation of David Cameron's conservative brand is put into practice.	The findings indicated that the party's strength, distinctiveness, and experience had a more significant impact on voting preference compared to the other characteristics. Nevertheless, all factors had a favourable correlation with voting behaviour.

Source: Research Desk, 2024.

3. METHODOLOGY

Considering the research's requirement for conducting interviews and distributing questionnaires to obtain data, our philosophical stance is objectivism. This involves the application of nomothetic technique. Considering the information provided, the study chose to use a cross-sectional survey method since it focusses on examining groups of persons in a certain geographic region at a specific moment in time. The population of this research consists of registered Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in Port Harcourt. There are more than 52 coalitions of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Port Harcourt (https://web.facebook.com/rivcso/?_rdc=1&_rdr). Since the population size is manageable, there was no need for sample, hence the research adopted census sampling technique; as it administered copies of questionnaire to a senior member or high ranking officer of each of the CSOs.

The data for this study were collected from two main sources - primary and secondary. While the former data was collected through the administration of questionnaires, the later data was obtained from various sources such as online publications, journal papers, textbooks, and so on. Furthermore, the study instrument underwent expert review in the field of management research. Furthermore, a preliminary research was conducted to pinpoint deficiencies in the instrument's design and subsequently reorganise it. Furthermore, the Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted to determine the instrument's dependability. Finally, data analysis were conducted at two levels. The first level is the principal level, which utilised descriptive statistics such as tables, charts, graphs, and other similar tools. However, at the secondary level, Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to assess the hypotheses provided earlier in the study. It is imperative to emphasise that all data analyses were conducted using SPSS (Version 23.0).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section focused on analyzing data retrieved from the field with the help of the research instrument. Discussions of various findings was treated accordingly.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Questionnaire Distribution Rate

Table 4.1 Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval

Questionnaire	Frequency	Percent (%)
Administered Copies	52	100
Returned Copies	47	90
Not returned Copies	5	10
Returned & used Copies	45	87

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 23 Output

Table 4.1 displayed a count of 52 questionnaires, with 47 of them, or for 90%, being returned. Furthermore, 5 copies were not returned, whereas 45 copies, accounting for 87% of the total, were both returned and deemed beneficial.

4.1.2 Validity Test Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and discriminant validity was be carried out. The table below showed the discriminant validity results:

Table 4.2: Discriminant Validity

Construct	GP	GPR	GI	CR
GP	0.94	0.353	0.381	0.401
GPR	0.353	0.98	0.268	0.444
GI	0.381	0.268	0.91	0.343
CR	0.401	0.444	0.343	0.90

Source: Computed from Pilot Study CFA results, 2024.

Table 4.2 shows that the average variance retrieved exceeds the criterion of 0.5 in all instances. These coefficients above the 0.7 criterion for convergent reliability, indicating that all the scales meet the requirements for convergent validity and may be used reliably for future research. The Table clearly demonstrates that the square root of the average variance retrieved (shown in bold) for each construct is much greater than all the off-diagonal components of the correlation matrix, which indicate the correlation between the constructs. Consequently, the criterion of discriminant validity has been met.

4.1.3 Reliability Results

Table 4.3: Results from Cronbach Alpha Tests

Variables Entered	Cronbach Alpha Scores
Party Culture	0.891
Party Relationship	0.825
Voters' Satisfaction	0.822
Voters' Referral	0.837

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 23 Output

The reliability test data indicate that if Cronbach's Alpha is more than 0.70, the instrument (variables) has satisfactory reliability test results. Furthermore, given that Cronbach's Alpha is greater than 0.7, as determined by the reliability test, we may confidently conclude that the research instrument is deemed acceptable.

4.1.4 Testing of Hypotheses

A total of four hypotheses were formulated and Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient tool was used to test them.

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Party culture has no significant relationship with voters' satisfaction of political parties in Rivers State.

Table 4.4: Correlation Analysis showing the Relationship between of Party Culture and Voters’ Satisfaction

			Correlations	
			Party Culture	Voters’ Satisfaction
Spearman's rho	Party Culture	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.872
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	45	45
	Voters’ Satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	.872	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	45	45

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 23 Output

Decision: The table above shows a Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.872 and a probability value of 0.000. The outcome demonstrates a robust and favourable correlation between the culture of political parties and the level of satisfaction among voters towards these parties in Rivers State. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, as the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level of 0.05.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: Party culture has no significant relationship with voters’ referral of political parties in Rivers State.

Table 4.5: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between of Party Culture and Voters’ Referral.

			Correlations	
			Party Culture	Voters’ Referral
Spearman's rho	Party Culture	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.886*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	45	45
	Voters’ Referral	Correlation Coefficient	.886*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	45	45

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 23 Output

Decision: The table above shows a Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.886 and a probability value of 0.000. This indicates a strong and positive correlation between party culture and voters' referral towards political party in Rivers State. As a result, we reject the

null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, since the probability value (0.000) is less than the significance level of 0.05.

Hypothesis Three

H03: Party relationship has no significant relationship with voters’ satisfaction of political parties in Rivers State.

Table 4.6: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between Party Relationship and Voters’ Satisfaction

Correlations			Party Relationship	Voters’ Satisfaction
Spearman's rho	Party Relationship	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.859
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	45	45
Spearman's rho	Voters’ Satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	.859	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	45	45

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 23 Output

Decision: The table above displays a Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.859 and a probability value of 0.000. This outcome suggests a robust and positive association between party culture and the satisfaction of electorates towards political parties in Rivers State. Consequently, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, as the probability value (0.000) is less than the significance level of 0.05. This implies that party culture has a significant impact on voter satisfaction.

Hypothesis Four

H04: Party relationship has no significant relationship with voters’ referral of political parties in Rivers State.

Table 4.7: Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship between of Party Relationship and Electorates’ Referral

Correlations			Party Relationship	Voters’ Referral
Spearman's rho	Party Relationship	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.859
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	45	45
Spearman's rho	Voters’ Referral	Correlation Coefficient	.859	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	45	45

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024, SPSS 23 Output

Decision: The table above displays a Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.859 and a probability value of 0.000. This outcome demonstrates a robust and favourable correlation between party affiliation and voters' inclination to recommend political parties in Rivers State. Thus, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, as the p-value (0.000) is less than the significance level of 0.05.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one (Ho1) sought to investigate the correlation between party culture and voter satisfaction of political parties in Rivers State. The hypothesis was evaluated using Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient. The findings indicated a robust and favourable correlation between party culture and the satisfaction of electorates ($Rho=0.872$). This suggests a robust and favourable correlation between party culture and voters' satisfaction. Hypothesis two (H02) likewise shown a strong and statistically significant correlation between party culture and the tendency of electorates to recommend political parties in Rivers ($Rho=0.886$). These results, however, align with the findings of Kapferer (2008), who discovered that political brand identification greatly influences voters' decision-making. Furthermore, Friday (2008) discovered that the psychological identity of both the candidate and the party itself has a positive correlation with voters' attitude towards the party. This, in turn, affects their decision-making process when it comes to voting and leads to the practice of patronage. The author further contended that in the majority of situations, voters form their assessment based on their affinity towards party culture, which is a crucial component in constructing identity.

Our findings support Hypothesis three (H03), indicating a robust and positive association ($r = 0.859$) between party affiliation and voters' satisfaction. Hypothesis four attempted to evaluate the correlation between party affiliation and the endorsement of political parties by voters in Rivers State. These findings align with the research conducted by Keller (2003), which indicated that party affiliation contributes to increased loyalty and word-of-mouth recommendations. The author stated that voters often align themselves with parties that possess consistent ideas and demonstrate the political resolve to fulfil campaign pledges.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The application of marketing techniques by political strategists is gaining momentum. The idea of conceiving political parties to be more like products and services, requiring strategic effort to position them in the minds of electorates; is evident in many scholarly works, including this research. Consequently, political parties can position their brands by upholding enduring societal values and culture, which reflects how they carry out their activities and the kind of individuals championing the party's course. Hence, Party culture is a strategic political tool that can be used in improving voter satisfaction and referral. More so, voters' overall impression or perception towards a political parties is key in influencing voter patronage.

In addition, the level of relationship between a political party and relevant stakeholders is a vital element in determining the party's survival. It is interesting to mention that while alert

political parties strive to strengthen the internal workings of the organization, however, the onus lies on the perception of electorates and other stakeholders, as to what they feel about this parties and whether there is a cordial relationship between them and the parties. This entails that voter patronage towards political brands would improve where there is a strong bond between the people and political organizations.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on these conclusions, this research recommended that political leaders who want to improve voter patronage are encouraged to develop and maintain consistent societal values and strong positive ideologies which the populace would always recognize them with such. Political parties should make effort to build emotional bonds with the people as they relate with relevant stakeholders. They are also advice on keeping to electioneering promises and be consistent with party conducts in line with the constitution and that of the country; as this study has proven that such conducts would enhance electorates' confidence and positive word-of-mouth referral.

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