POLITICAL PARTY BRAND CREDIBILITY AND VOTERS' DECISION MAKING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between political party brand credibility and voters' decision making in Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey in its investigation of the variables. Primary data was generated through structured questionnaire. The target population of this study was eighty four million, four thousand and eighty four (84,004, 084). Given an accessible population of twenty six million, six hundred and thirty four thousand six hundred and five (26,634,605) within the six geo-political zones in Nigeria, the sample size of 384 was determined using calculated using the Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. The hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.0. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that there is a significant political party brand credibility and voters' decision making in Nigeria. The study concluded that when political parties adopt and build brand credibility it has a positive influence on voters' decision making in Nigeria. The study recommended that political parties should emphasize the marketing brands (candidates) through the electioneering campaigns based on such candidates' credibility.

Keywords: *Political Party Brand credibility, Voters' Decision Making, Classic Rational Choice, Confirmatory Decision-Making, Fast & Frugal Decision*

INTRODUCTION

Branding is a core element of strategic political communications. There are many compelling reasons for organizations to adopt a branding strategy (Davies, Chun, da Silva & Roper, 2003; De Chernatony, 1999). Brands help create differentiation from competitors. They reduce perceptions of risk and assist with recall. Brands have psychological effects, becoming part of identity constructs and fostering loyalty, and their characteristics are transferrable to affiliated entities. Ultimately, brands command a premium

because customers value them. However, there is a destructive side to brands. For example, emphasis on strategic messages necessarily suppresses some information (Bertilsson & Rennstam, 2018).

Party brands are the sum of all tangible and intangible communications. The tangible touch points are visible, such as politicians, the party name and party colors. This includes personnel who interact with citizens as "the living face of the organization" (Haywood, 2005: 152) and whose tangible behaviours are crucial to perception evaluation about the brand (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Consequently, people on the frontlines are encouraged to adopt a homogenous identity as they embrace the brand's vision, culture, positioning, personality, relationship and presentation as part of their lifestyle (De Chernatony, 1999). The intangibles of a brand are nonphysical aspects, such as image, messaging, symbolism, values and personality (De Chernatony and Riley 1998; also Scammell, 2007). The intangibles of a party brand also include policies, accomplishments, failures and partisan identity. For some partisans, ideological

sorting transcends issues as they take identity cues from their preferred political party (Mason, 2018). They can become so enamored that the party brand becomes part of their own identity, turning them into brand evangelists who are fervent advocates of what amounts to image over substance, which contributes to political polarization. This study therefore examined the relationship between political party brand credibility and voters' decision-making in the context of Nigeria political environment.

Specifically, the following objectives were to:

- Examine the relationship between political party brand credibility and voters' classic rational choice in Nigeria.
- Determine the relationship between political party brand credibility and voters' confirmatory decision making in Nigeria.
- Investigate the relationship between political party brand credibility and voters' fast and frugal decision in Nigeria.
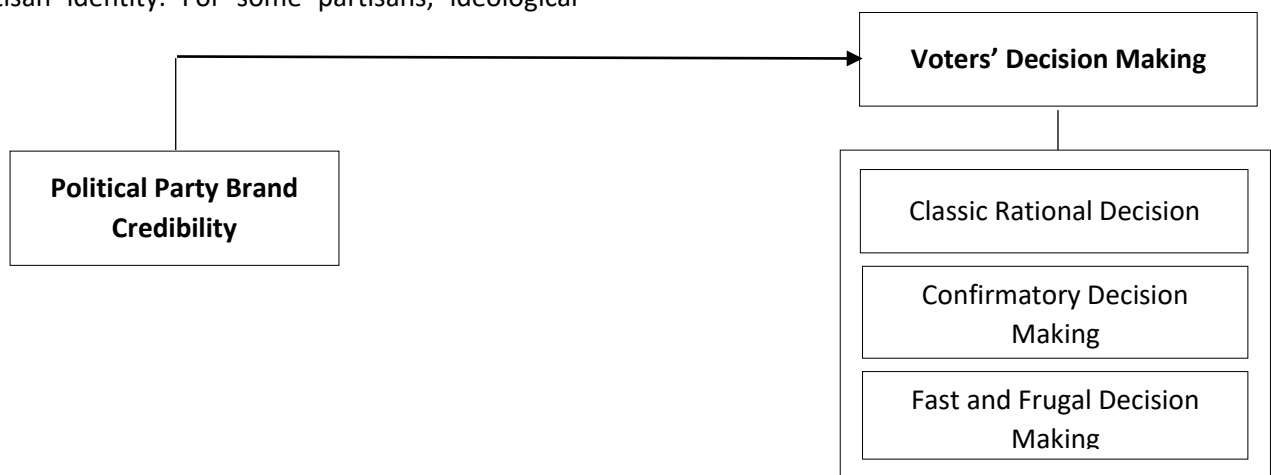
Figure 1: Conceptual model for political party brand credibility and voters' decision making

Source: Researcher (2021)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

Exchange Theory
One of the most fundamental theories underlying the field of social marketing is exchange theory

(Peattie & Peattie, 2003; Rothschild, 1999). From its original roots in economics, the notion of exchange is foundational to the field of marketing. According to exchange theory, people are willing to pay the price for things that they believe have value. Kotler (2000) argues that there are five underlying

requirements of exchange theory: 1. there are at least two parties, 2. each party has something that has value to the other party, 3. each party is free to accept or reject the exchange, 4. each party is willing to deal with the other party, and 5. each party can communicate and deliver on their promises. The notion of exchange can be conceptualized where people "weigh the costs of a particular choice against the benefits. When the benefits are seen to outweigh the costs, people are likely to purchase the product. Applied to the field of social marketing. The notion of "price is broadened; however, the central postulate of exchange theory remains the same those exchanges must be mutually beneficial. Social marketers must demonstrate that the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived costs for the voluntary behaviour to become attractive (Maibach, 1993). As a result, exchange theory becomes the foundational theoretical tenant that underlies political marketing and social marketing (Luca & Suggs, 2013; lruong, 2014), so we must keep this Foundation in mind as we encourage people's behaviors (Rothschild, 1999).

Involvement Theory

Involvement is an important aspect of how people process messages. This theory was uncovered by psychologists and has been applied widely in marketing. Often attributed to Krugman (1965) or Petty and Cacioppo (1979). when people are highly interested in or "involved" with, a message, they are believed to be more motivated to think about it and Process the information more thoroughly; however, when their interest and motivation is lower, they are expected to rely on shortcuts or "heuristics" that simplify their efforts. The notion of involvement has been applied frequently in commercial marketing, often to aspects of the product itself where people are believed to spend more effort considering "high- involvement" products than low-involvement" products. As a result, different types of messages, especially advertising messages, are used to match consumer motivation levels. One such application of this approach is the development of a theory of a "hierarchy of effects" where the most effective sequencing of information given to potential customers depends on their involvement with the product or service.

Political Party Brand Credibility

Credibility is a function of durable performances, achievement archives, responsibility, and honesty to voters (Barnes, Leonidou, Siu &Lenidou, 2015). Bill el al. (2016) emphasized that credibility/sincerity ensues when an individual/organization can be trusted to fulfil promise(s) made. Braha and de Aguiar (2017) opined that the voters' decision making is determined by economic and psychological factors and influenced by social and cultural values. This is because voters make decision based on their level of trust or distrust in the political party/candidate. Credibility/sincerity is time-sensitive, a credible/sincere political party/candidate is conscious of their speculated time for voters to consider them trustworthy enough for their votes because of the dynamism in today's political environment. Bill, Paul, Yuanfei, Baofeng and Sanjay (2016) opined that credibility/sincerity is the ability to achieve poise, reliability, and trust from other individuals over time, it is built gradually. According to the Institute in Basie Life Principles (IBLP) (2001), the term sincerity comes from the root word "sincere" derived from the Latin word "sincerus", which means "whole, pure, genuine. Hence, sincerity is the ability to maintain authenticity. Credibility/ sincerity is living without duplicity, which is intentional deception. Simons, (2002) opined that credibility/sincerity is a multi-dimensional term involving a person's perspective of another's applicable knowledge, honesty and good intentions towards him/her.

Herbig and Milewicz (1995) opined that credibility/sincerity is the plausibility of an organization's/individual's intentions at a particular moment in time. In the business environment, no firm can enjoy long-term success without credibility/sincerity because it must first be

perceived before an organization's message and intent will have any positive effect on its target market. Credibility/sincerity is recognized as a basis for the development of Sustainable, long-term business relationships. Mavondo and Rodrigo (2001) submitted that Credibility/sincerity is the trustworthiness of an organization's/person's intents at a particular moment in time. Hoetfler and Keller (2002) argued that credibility/sincerity can be demonstrated in an organization s brand. And brand credibility/sincerity should be perceived in terms of competency, innovativeness, and trustworthiness (being reliable in satisfying Customers' needs) and likeability (being interesting and worth spending time with). They insisted that brand credibility/Sincerity can be established by corporate societal marketing for the organization to be perceived as unbiased and as a credible/sincere. Barnes, Leonidou, Siu and Lenidou (2015) indicated that credibility/sincerity is a function of durable performances, achievement archives, responsibility, and honesty to customers. McCroskey (1998) submitted that the level of credibility/sincerity is often determined by the attitude of the recipient which references the extent to which the source is perceived to be believable because it is dependent on the level of competence, Character, and Care perceived. Herbig and Milewicz (1995) argued that a decent character/reputation produces Credibility. Hence, credibility/sincerity and decent character/reputation are interrelated loyalty when brand personally a mediating role in this effect. Additionally, the influence of party brand personality on satisfaction and loyalty of voters was different for the selected four political parties. The outcome from their study carries strong implications for the political parties and the political marketers to develop pertinent marketing and communication strategies that are consistent with their personality traits, with an endeavour to enhance the satisfaction and loyalty of voters.

Classic rational Choice Decision– Making

Rational choice theory has been claimed to be the prevailing view on the political science today

(Brogan, 2001). Michael, (2013) indicated that the classic rational choice is a growing paradigm in political science and can be applied to a range of areas in the discipline, especially, voting behavior, policy formulation and implementation, rule formation, amongst others. Classic rational choice began with Downs' (1957) classic study on economic rationality, he argued that rationality is measured by how voters strive for what they desire, or at least

Classic Rational Choice Decision-Making

Rational choice theory has been claimed to be the prevailing view in political science today (Brogan, 2001). Michael (2013) indicated that the classic rational choice is a growing paradigm in political Science and can be applied to a range of areas in the discipline, especially, voting behavior. Policy formulation and implementation, rule formation, among others. Classic rational choice began with Downs' (l957) classic study on economic rationality, he argued that rationality is measured by how voters Strive for what they desire, or at least act as if they were pursuing some end based on the information available to them (Brams, 1987). Edlin, Gelman and Kaplan (2007) proved that voting is considered rational when voters have 'social' preferences and are concerned about social welfare. Classic rational choice involves actively gathering as much information as one possibly can about every candidate/party on the ballot (Lau, *et al* 2013). In other words, classic rational choice has to do with making voters decisions after deep, comparable search. Leiter, (2013) refers to the set of voters who are likely to be more aware of parties ideological and policy sophisticated voters". Lau and Redlawsk (2001) indicated that voters who make classic rational choices gather and process ideological information and have a greater incentive to use this information in making voting decisions. Classic rational choice involves weighing positive and negative qualities associated with each political party/candidate based on the information available (Chong 2013). With the classic rational choice strategy, there is no room for emption or other

variables that could influence the active processing of the information. Downs noted several emotional factors that could influence rational behavior but claimed that he was only looking from a political rather than a psychological perspective (Downs, 1957). Emotion has not been considered as a component of decision making within the rational choice paradigm: instead it has been broadly perceived as irrational and therefore irrelevant. Moreover, Evans (2001) argued that emotions are associated with weakness of both thinking and action.

However, the classic rational choice strategy emanates from the rational choice theory which supposes that voters make their voting decisions in ne with their own self-interest (Dean &Croft, 2009) These notions of classic rational choice have suggested that voters make their electoral decisions just as if they were buying products or services. However, Habermas (1992) argued that currently political party/ candidate identification and information search has been condensed into images, signs, and symbols, and it weakens the democratic decision-making process. This encourages mostly a homogenous response to political issues which can perpetrate voters' manipulation through political communications. Lupia, MeCubbins and Popkin (2000) took a more extensive view of classic rational choice and suggested that 'a rational choice is one that is grounded in motives, irrespective of what these motives may be.

Confirmatory Decision-Making

Confirmatory decision-making is one of the decision strategies identified by Lau and Redlawsk (2013) as "models of decision making" that are used by citizens in making voting decisions. However, it started in 1960, when an English psychologist called Peter Wason coined the term" confirmation bias" (Yeoung, 2019). Confirmatory decision-making strategy is the direct opposite of the classic rational choice, it occurs when people misconstrue newly existing information as supporting previously held beliefs, even when there is no clear evidence for its

validity (Akerlof, 1989). Teri (2018) argued that confirmatory decision-making strategy is the inclination to gather information even in an objective search and make voting decisions that are in consonance with the voters already existing beliefs. This type of bias has led to the perpetration of "fake news" that is passed on without examination on social media platforms and wrong voting decisions (Hunjra, Salman & Lubna, 2016). Confirmatory decision-making is, in essence, when a voter makes a voting decision in view of new pieces of information from the world around him in a subjective, misguided manner, based on his/her prior opinion (Kosnik,2007). According to Lodge & Taber (2013) with the confirmatory decision-making strategy, information search is more often passive than active. Eyal, Mani and Far (2017) opined that confirmatory decision-making strategy is a prejudice that seeks, interprets information, and make decisions that indorses pre-existing beliefs. It is insidious because it affects the choices of voters during elections. Once a voter has formed his/her opinion concerning a political party/candidate, the argument goes, further pieces of evidence on the abilities of that political party/candidate can be used to support both a positive, or a negative, assessment of that very same candidate /political party, depending on the initial beliefs of the voter (Hunjra, Salman & Lubna, 2016) Confirmatory decision-making strategy affects how voters perceive the world around them, how they remember things, how they interpret the information available to them and how they process what is otherwise neutral information -and it tends to be favorable to their beliefs (Ayal et al. 2017). According to Yeoung (2019) confirmatory decision making is a bias and a common mental error that occurs when a pre-existing belief impedes on the way we think, make decisions, and lake actions. When voters have a belief or hypothesis in their minds that they think is true knowingly or unknowingly, they are more likely to seek more evidence to prove it right and make decisions that are aligned with their beliefs.

Fast & Frugal Decision-Making

The Fast and Frugal Decision-Making strategy is based On Herbert Simon' s bounded rationality theory Simon (1956; 1972; 1982). It is based on heuristics, that are construed as a trade-off between the confines of the human mind and the computing performance needed for solving complex problems (Schilirò, 2017). GerdGigerenzer proposed a psychological approach based on fast & frugal heuristics to examine simple substitutes to a full rationality analysis as a tool between for decision making. He maintained that simple heuristic's habitually lead to better decisions than the theoretically optimal procedure (Gigerenzer, Hertwig & Pachur, 2011). In applied settings, people make decisions under different degrees of obscurity, that is, when risks are unknown or cannot be calculated. In such situations, decisions can be made using fast-and-frugal decision-making strategy or heuristics (Sebastian, Waeger, Marewski & Gigerenzerd, 2016). Fast & frugal decision-making refers to the application of environmentally lucid heuristics, such as the recognition heuristic, which are rooted in the psychological capabilities that we have evolved as human animals (e.g., memory and perceptual systems). It is referred to as "fast & frugal" because they are effective under conditions of bounded rationality "when information, knowledge, time, and the ability to compute are limited (Goldstein & Gigerenzer, 2002). Fast and frugal decision-making strategy is a simple, task-specific decision strategy that is an aspect of a voters decision-making repertoire of cognitive strategies for making voting decisions (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996; Gigerenzer & Todd, 1999). According to Lau et al, (2018), fast & frugal decision-making strategy assumes that voters are driven mostly by efficiency, actively seeking only the most diagnostic information that will allow them to quickly make the correct voting choice. They maintained that Information-Seeking should be limited to the one or two most Important/ diagnostic criteria, but those few criteria Should be justly applied to every alternative in the choice set-that is, shallow but comparable search Fast and frugal heuristics are rules of thumb for decision makings they are easy, task specific decision strategies that are part of a decision maker s collection of cognitive strategies for solving problems and decision tasks (Schiliro, 2017). Reimer and Rieskamp (2007) argued that the fast & frugal heuristics recognizes not only the result of the decision-making process but also the process itself. It consists of Simple building blocks that specify how information is searched for (search rule), when to stop Information search (stopping rule), and how the processed information is integrated into a decision (decision rule). Fast & frugal decision-making strategy yield voters' decisions that is ecologically rational rather than logically consistent.

Political Party Brand Credibility and Voters Decision-Making

The study by Pich, Armannsdotir, Dean, Spry and Jain (2019) on Problematizing the presentation and reception of political brands: The strategic and operational nature of the political Brand alignment model was set to build an understanding of how political brand messages and values are received and aligned with voter expectations, which in turn shapes the consistency and credibility of a political brand. Using an interpretivist perspective, this two-Stage approach first focused on semi-structured interviews with internal stakeholders of the UK Conservative Party and second used focus group discussions with external stakeholders (voters) of age 18-24 years. Data was collected between 1 December 2014 and 6 May 2015. The findings from their study suggest that the UK Conservative brand had recovered from the "nasty party" reputation. Further, the Conservative brand was perceived as credible, trustworthy, and responsible, with positive associations of "economic competence". However, while the nasty party imagery has declined, the UK Conservative brand continues to face challenges particularly in terms of longstanding negative associations perceived by both internal and external markets. French and Smith (2010), examined "measuring political brand equity: a consumer oriented approach, win the purpose of developing

an understanding of how voters view the political brand by & analyzing the mental maps that voters create when asked to think about a political party. The analysis is both in terms of the nature of the maps and in terms of the equity associated with a map. The method provided interesting insights into the nature and equity of brand associations for the two main political protagonists, i.e. Conservative and Labor. Key branded characteristics were highlighted for each party, both in terms of general structure, and those associations that form a central role in voters' maps. For the partisan sample chosen, both parties were shown to have strong brand equity, with the Conservatives slightly stronger than Labor. Based on the foregoing discuss, this study hypothesized thus:

Ho$_1$: Political party brand competence has no significant relationship with classic rational choice in Nigeria.

Ho$_2$: Political party brand competence has no significant relationship with confirmatory decision-making in Nigeria.

Ho$_3$: Political party brand competence has no significant relationship with fast & frugal in Nigeria decision-making in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Primary data was generated through structured questionnaire. The target population of this study was eighty four million, four thousand and eighty four (84,004, 084). Given an accessible population of twenty six million, six hundred and thirty four thousand six hundred and five (26,634,605) within the six geo-political zones in Nigeria, the sample size of 384 was determined using calculated using the Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination. The reliability of the instrument was achieved by the use of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with all the items scoring above 0.70. The hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.0. The tests were carried out at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Correlations for Brand Credibility and Voters' Decision Making

		Political Party Brand Credibility	Classic Rational Decision	Confirmatory Decision	Fast and Frugal Decision
Political Party Brand Credibility	Pearson Correlation	1	.985**	.975**	.974**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	384	384	384	384
Classic Rational Decision	Pearson Correlation	.985**	1	.984**	.993**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	384	384	384	384
Confirmatory Decision	Pearson Correlation	.975**	.984**	1	.988**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	384	384	384	384
Fast and Frugal Decision	Pearson Correlation	.974**	.993**	.988**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	384	384	384	384

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
Source: SPSS Output

Ho₁: Political party brand credibility has no significant relationship with classic rational choice in Nigeria.

The result of correlation matrix obtained between political party brand credibility and classic rational decision is shown in Table 1. The correlation coefficient of *0.985* confirms the degree and strength of this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000<0.01. The coefficient represents a very strong correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between political party brand credibility and classic rational decision in Nigeria.

Ho₂: Political party brand credibility has no significant relationship with confirmatory decision in Nigeria.

The result of correlation matrix obtained between political party brand credibility and confirmatory decision is shown in Table 1. The correlation coefficient of *0.975* confirms the degree and strength of this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000<0.01. The coefficient represents a very strong correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between political party brand credibility and confirmatory decision in Nigeria.

Ho₃: Political party brand credibility has no significant relationship with fast and frugal decision in Nigeria.

The result of correlation matrix obtained between political party brand credibility and fast and frugal decision is shown in Table 1. The correlation coefficient of *0.974* confirms the degree and strength of this relationship and it is significant at p 0.000<0.01. The coefficient represents a very strong correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between political party brand credibility and fast and frugal decision in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The relationship between Political Party Brand Credibility and Voters' Decision making is one other thrust of this thesis. In chapter four of this thesis, it was seen that result of the Person Product Moment Correlation test showed a positively significant and very strong relationship between political party brand competence and the three indices of voters' decision making. This finding differs from the study of Adams, Esrow and Somer-Topcu (2011); Fernandez-Vazquez (2014) whose studies found a weak relationship between changes in the policies that Parties propose in their campaigns, as captured in election manifestos, and voter perceptions or Party positions. The findings from this present study suggest that the voters' choices aboutpolitical parties have many similarities with how they make their choices about political brands Therefore, political parties are now constantly applying the concept and strategies of brand management to make the political product attractive, appealable, trustable, differentiable, a source of long-term relationships, and a decision-making driver. The finding from this study also collaborates with Braha and de Aguiar (2017) who found that the voters' decision making is determined by economic and psychological factors and influenced by social and cultural values. This is because voters make decision based on their level of trust or distrust in the political party/candidate. Credibility/sincerity is time-sensitive; a Credible/Sincere political party/candidate is conscious of their speculated time for voters to consider them trustworthy enough for their votes because of the dynamism in today's political environment. Herbig and Milewicz (1995) argued that a decent character/reputation produces credibility.

In previous studies, three components of the credibility concepts were distinguished based on consistency, ability, and likeability of the source (Keller, 2006):

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- Reliability/trustworthiness, the degree to which an object is an honest source of information, products, services, and other matters.
- Expertise, the degree to which an object has relevant knowledge and skills
- Attractiveness, the degree to which an object is valued by sympathetic behavior, ambition, perseverance, smartness, and other personality-like characteristics.

Although these three components in some cases are related to each other, has shown that both regarding specific companies as well as specific products, reliability, expertise, and attractiveness measure distinct aspects of the credibility construct.

Theoretically, from a normative point of view, the political communication should help citizens make informed voting decisions (Fernandez-Vazquez, 2019). The finding from this study is in line with the "involvement Theory". Involvement is an important aspect of how people process messages. This theory was uncovered by psychologists and has been applied widely in marketing. Often attributed to Krugman (1965) or petty and Cacioppo (1979), when people are highly interested or "involved" with a message, they are believed to be more motivated to think about it and process the information more thoroughly: however, when their interest and motivation is lower, they are expected to reply on shortcuts or "heuristics" that simplify their efforts. The notion of involvement has been applied frequently in commercial marketing, often to aspects of the product itself where people are believed to spend more effort considering "high-involvement" products that "low-involvement" products. As a result, different types of messages, especially advertising messages, are used a match consumer motivation levels.

From the foregoing discuss, political parties must focus on shaping the voters opinion and attitude to generate positive voting preferences. These positive preferences increase the vote bank of the political parties and eventually lead to the development of the party brand credibility. This credibility depends on how the brand is communicated to the voters at the constituency level through social interaction is critical. Brand credibility is the outcome of the role of the political party in the political socialization process of the community. Where, the voters and the political parties interact with each other. This interaction facilitates in shaping the attitude and behaviour of the voters. However the degree of change in the attitude and behaviour of the voters depends on the level of the interaction among the social actors of the community. There are several social factors and actors who play active roles in the political socialization process including parents, family, friends, teachers, mode of study, demographic factors, opinion leaders, and many more.

The concept of branding in politics is not mature and has limited consideration regarding the degree to which political choices by voters can be conceptualized in relation to consumer brands. Moreover, the party equity needs to be deeply explored before building it on the patterns of commercial brand equity typologies. Therefore, the PBE model is conceptualized based on the following constructs: the role of political parties in the socialization process, the generation of political knowledge (brand awareness, brand association, and brand image) as an outcome of the socialization process, party, loyalty, and the resulting effect of these constructs on the attitude of the voters toward the party. Then the impact of the attitude of the voters toward the party on the voting preferences is conceptualized in the PBE model.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study concluded that when political parties adopt and build brand credibility it has a positive influence on voters' decision making in Nigeria.

The study recommended that political parties should emphasize the marketing brands (candidates) through the electioneering campaigns based on such candidates' credibility.

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