
Nwachukwu Chima Peter¹, Achor Princewell Nwanganga², Nkwocha, Charles Azubuike³, Okwara Chinedu Canice⁴

¹ Department of Marketing, Abia State Polytechnic Aba, Abia State, Nigeria*
² Department of Marketing, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nsukka, Nigeria
³ & ⁴ Department of Marketing, Imo State Polytechnic Umuagwo, Imo State, Nigeria

Abstract: This article is a response to numerous calls by political marketing scholars and practitioners to integrate interdisciplinary concepts and ideology in the studying or interpreting certain phenomena in democratic or political and social settings. It examines voter choice and decision making within the confines of consumer-oriented marketing paradigm. The main objective of this research is to conceptually explore how choice theory can be adapted in explaining voter choice and decision in political marketing, thereby establish the interface between marketing-oriented and exchange paradigm, and normative political science interpretation of voter behaviour and electoral decisions. The rational choice theory is adopted as the theoretical framework for examining the subject matter. A mixed research design: exploratory and qualitative methods were used to examine the subject matter, and also inferences were drawn from other interdisciplinary domains as a way to provide balanced argument. Emphasis is laid on party marketing orientation and how political parties in Nigeria can utilize rational choice theory as enabler of informed voter choice and decision making.

Keywords: Voter Choice, Decision Making, Choice theory, Party Marketing Orientation, Political marketing

1. Introduction

Recent Scholarships in the field of political marketing have demonstrably called for integration of different theoretical constructs from the mainstream marketing and political science literature [1],[2],[3],[4] into a sound research framework for explaining certain phenomena (e.g. voter behaviour/ choice and decision making, etc[5],[6]. Even though political marketing mentality in construing and galvanising ideological thrust for explaining voter choice(marketing-oriented paradigm) differs from the ‘normative mentality approach’ used in political science[7], there is a need to strike a triad that practically examines their interface.

The non or minimal exploration of this interface has created a gap in the literature that have tried to examine the marriage between marketing discipline and political science discipline as a new research direction in understanding politics and behaviour of political actors, especially the voters. This current research will bridge this gap by examining broadly voters’ choice and decision through the adoption of rational choice theory widely explained in the fields of politics, public affairs and democracy [6],[8], [5].

The exchange/ rational paradigm which underpins consumer (voter) caveat in mainstream marketing ([11], [10] forms the pivot on which our discussion revolves. The exchange paradigm of marketing theory provides a unique platform for differential perspective on what constitutes a political exchange and voter decision in an electoral setting. This notion is blended with the marketing-oriented voting behaviour frameworks as we explore party marketing orientation, which has been widely examined by LeesMarshment, [11], Ormod, [12], Achor et al[4].

The main objective of this research is to conceptually explore how choice theory can be adapted in explaining voter choice and decision in political marketing, thereby establish the interface between marketing-oriented and exchange paradigm, and normative political science interpretation of voter behaviour and electoral decisions. Another objective is to examine how party marketing orientation can be leveraged on by political parties in Nigeria to provide electorate-focused information for informed voter choice and decision making.
To x-ray these objectives, the article is divided into seven strands or fields. The first strand sets the stage by providing conceptual and theoretical guides on previous attempts aimed at examining political marketing approach to interpreting democratic concepts and ideologies. The second field examines voter choice and decision making within the confines of consumer-oriented marketing. In attempt to examine the subject matter, this field draws inferences from other interdisciplinary domains as a way to provide balanced argument.

The third strand examined the theoretical foundation of the article, which underpinned the basic arguments throughout the discussions that x-rayed choice and decision making. Here, the rational choice theory is adopted as the theoretical framework. The fourth strand briefly discussed the research design cum methodology adopted for the article — a mixed approach (exploratory and qualitative approaches), that explains the architectural direction and structure required in academic research. The fifth strand discursively probed voter choice and decision making in Nigeria political landscape. Through evidenced-based or experienced-based arguments different ways voters engage in electoral decision making and choice were explored or exposed. Such exposure is meant to provoke the electorate, political parties in Nigeria and other political actors to rethink the way votes are solicited and the way electorate respond to stimuli prior to elections. The sixth strand examines party marketing orientation and how political parties in Nigeria can utilize it as enabler of informed voter choice and decision making. The seventh field draws the curtain by providing a discussion, conclusion and recommendations based on key arguments presented.

2. Strand I: Setting the Stage through a Methodological and Conceptual Clarifications

In terms of research foci and research methodologies, the notion of systemic and structural connectedness of political marketing with social and cultural aspects of democratic systems have been explored by early exponents/scholars of political marketing like Lees Marshmen [13], Collins and Butler [14], [15],[16],[18], Henneberg [1]. These scholars and others like Cunningham, [16], Henneberg[1] have in varying contexts x-rayed the relationship of political marketing with different concepts of democracy. Such x-ray provided suitable platform for further discussions in a (post)modern world within a marketing democracy of "signification and representation" [19].

Research on voter choice and decision within the political marketing had developed along two theoretical constructs: (1) marketing perceptions on voter attitudes and behaviour based on voter exposure to certain political marketing activities and offerings or how citizens perceive policy promises and their implementation [20],[21], (2) understanding voters connectedness to offerings in the political marketing arena and their way of accessing and assessing them for an informed action [1],[10]. The first line of construct anchor on the knowledge of how voters react to certain issues considered to be important. Both constructs underpin consumer marketing-oriented voter behaviour which provides cognitive understanding of voters. More so, tendencies toward more cognitive psychological-influenced voting behaviour research allow for the use of consumer behaviour theory to be integrated as indentified by Henneberg [21].

The call by Henneberg[1] and Lees-Marshment [14] to develop a voting behaviour theory that is more aligned with modern political exchange phenomena deserves accelerated voice by the political marketing scholars. Several research agenda have been proposed for political marketing [1],[23], but it is instructive that we understand the dynamics or eclectic nature of political marketing and adopt an interdisciplinary methodologies. Insights gained from such interdisciplinary methodological mix will provide appropriate explanatory constructs that befit pluralistic Nigeria political environment. It is on that basis that choice theory, which is an economic theory is adopted in this current research as a way of heeding to the call by Henneberg[1] and Achor and Mogululwa [10] for integration of other interdisciplinary construct for explaining certain phenomena in political marketing.

The concept of voter behaviour tends to be emphasised in both political science and political marketing as a construct that underpins voter choice and decision making [5]. Voter behaviour denotes a particular way a voter reacts to political issues after evaluating alternatives provided through information processing. Also, behaviour can be triggered by offerings made by political parties and their candidates to the electorate. In partisan politics, political parties influence the electorate or the voter through its ideological stand or other offers embedded in the party manifestos [7]. It’s assumed in political marketing theory that voter-behaviour is guided through some thought processes instead of hunches. When such happens, the voter makes a choice; for example to vote candidate A or party B based on his convictions.
Having set the stage, attention is now focused on the second strand of the article.


Choice denotes an act of choosing between two or more possibilities; something that you can choose (Oxford, University Press, 2010). It can also be defined as the right to choose or the possibility of choosing. Decision-making refers to making choice among alternatives or under specific condition after considering collected information carefully [24]. It is a complex process influenced by many factors. In political marketing domain, voter choice refers to act of choosing between two or more political candidates or political parties. It can also mean that thing/political party/candidate or government policy which a voter has identified with, voted for or will vote for during election [25].

In consumer marketing, Wan chi Yang identified four characteristics for decision making which can be applied in political/voter choice and decision making. They include quality consciousness, brand consciousness, brand loyalty and confusion over choice.

Quality consciousness refers to a characteristic that measure the degree to which a consumer search carefully and systematically for the highest or very best quality in products [26],[27],[28]. Brand consciousness measure a consumer orientation to buying the more expensive, and well-known brands in the belief that the higher price of a product is an indicator of better quality. Consumers influenced by such characteristic are likely to purchase expensive products with famous international brands and believe that high prices are equal to high quality. Brand loyalty refers to characteristic indicating consumers who have favourite brands and have formed habit of patronising the brand repeatedly. Consumers of such style particularly like specific brands and shops and would like to purchase these products or brands repeatedly. Confusion over choice refers to characteristics that trigger confusion in the process of making choice of a product usually caused by information overload.

These four characteristics of purchase decision making also present some analogy in the way voters make choices. For example, a voter considers the qualities of candidates into various electoral positions and after evaluation or thought processes [10],[25], he makes a choice based on content of the character a candidate or the candidate’s marketing communications. A voter who goes through this thought process of choosing a candidate based on the quality of a candidate’s character and the voter convictions of what the candidate or its party can offer if it wins election revalidates Muzafer Sheriff and associates(1961) social judgement theory or postulations. SJT postulates that individuals interpret messages based on their orientation towards the subject being discussed, and their attitudinal composition.

Brand as key influencer in consumer decision has been conceptually explored in politics [30],[32] [16]. A distinctive brand personality can help create a set of unique and favourable association in consumer memory [31]; [32]. Brand personality has a critical role in directing consumer preference and choice as noted by Biel [33]. In politics, too, the ability of personality indirectly influencing voting intention has been noted [29] and demonstrably shown by Smith (2009) model of brand personality [30].

Though, research has shown that brand personality is not the only influence on voting behaviour (though for some voters this may be the case). Newman identifies personality as one of the five core influences on voter behaviour [29]. However, a voter can be confused by a brand’s personality, particularly if such a political brand has lots of information or message it conjures. Brand personality formation is determined by the same process as human personality. “It involves the personification of the brand based on that brand’s observed behaviour, allowing human traits to be inferred from action or stated intended action” [30].

The four key characteristics of or influencers on decision making particularly brand have shown how voter choice and decision can be understood within the consumer-oriented marketing approach to discerning voter behaviour. It is instructive to add that the consumer-oriented paradigm of voter-based decision provides core value to ontological perspective of choice theory and its integration into political marketing. However, in ideal context, voter decision either to participate or not in electoral process such as voting in an election may or not automatically be based on cost-benefit analysis. This is typified by different behavioural patterns or rather desires of some voters in Nigeria. This notion conforms to political economy normative postulations that electoral decision making anchor on cost-benefit analysis and political science voter decision based on behavioural approach.

Those two line of thoughts share some affinity that can be leveraged on to assess voter choice and decision in Nigeria. First, there are hard core voters...
who are ready to vote for a political party or a candidate just because they are loyalists [25],[4]. This group of voters conforms to Kotler’s ‘hard core loyalists’ in voter’s political party switching of loyalty [34]. This group of voters do not care about the cost or benefit of that party’s policy proposals (i.e. that impact such party’s or candidate’s policies or leadership style will have on the entire economy, if it eventually wins election). Secondly, there are the educated and well enlightened voters that weigh political parties/candidates’ manifestos in a cost benefit scale. Provided they have the right information, they support a candidate or vote against a political party based on their conviction or results of their cost-benefit analysis.

Thirdly, there is the compromising or floating voter whose aim or desire to participate in any election is to exchange his vote with money. Once such a voter receives money from dim witted politicians she/he could sell or mortgage her/his conscience [4],[25]. All these voter-decision descriptions provide further insights into consumer (voter) purchase decision orientation. Moreover, understanding the decision making process in voting has helped to uncover truths in other important fields where construct derived from voting has helped to uncover truths in other important fields where construct derived from exchange process has been examined [5].

A synthesis of what has been discussed so far brings to fore another dimension of understanding consumer (voter) behaviour in political marketing domain. Inferences drawn from knowledge of how people buy has really foster knowledge about how voters react to certain marketing activities and offerings in the political market and how citizens (voters) perceive policy promises and their implementation [1]. Arising from this notion is the fact that a theory of marketing-oriented voter behaviour may have some answers to questions regarding important and suitability of political marketing strategies and tactics in explaining some normative constructs or theories of democracy. The bottom line of this strand of the article is that understanding voter behaviour in political marketing means utilizing consumer behaviour theory to deepening understanding of voter behaviour. It also calls attention to the use of marketing-orientation or market-oriented understanding of voting behaviour to assess political choices of voters.

3.1. Voter Choice Decision Making Influencing Factors

Different strands of studies from both political science and political marketing fields suggest different ideological and non ideological influencing factors that guide voter choice and political decisions [2],[5],[6],[21],[30]. Some of the factors have been tangentially explored in the preceding sections without depicting them as influencers. In this section attempt is made to explain them in specific terms. However, it’s argued here, that voter choice decision goes or extend beyond making decision or choice on /of candidate or political party to vote for in an election but includes decisions taken either in support or against proposed government policy framework and or her stand on other critical national issues [10].

For purpose of clarity, the factors are categorised as ideological and non ideological influencing factors. Under the ideological dimension, the voter may be influenced by political party’s ideology that reinforces her/her belief, desires and expectation from a political party/ candidate. Oftentimes it is embedded in the party manifestos, which showcases political party agenda or programmes. In some cases, the ideological factor depicts what the political party believes in and stand for. Party manifesto gives information about party policies to the electorate [6]. From a single-dimensional ideological space, ideological preferences are determined by distances between the voter’s ideological position and the position the voter attributes to the parties that compete in the elections [35]. However, voters choice or decisions are based on “whether polices are consistent with the ideological stance of the party” and “the capacity of the party to produce the desired outcomes with the right policies’ [35].

The non ideological factor includes political branding and brand. Voters respond to political party positioning as strong brand personality. Brands affect how consumers (voters) evaluate political products and services. An important component of a brand’s image is its brand personality. There is a general acceptance in the marketing literature that brand is one of the main assets of an organization [36],[37],[38]. This is justified by the broadening of the marketing concept into social markets as noted by Kotler and Levy [39], hence the range of organizations and markets in which branding has been applied extend to churches, political parties, etc. And from our understanding of branding principles, voters’ behaviour tends to virtually reflect on consumer choice of the traditional physical markets paradigm [40].

Political branding now offers a better analogy in the interpretation of brand as a factor that influences voter choice decision. Political branding is about how a political organization or individual is perceived by the public [30]. It is broader than
the product, whereas a product has distinct functional parts such as a politician and policy; a brand is intangible and psychological. A political brand is the overarching feeling, impression, association or image the public has towards a politician, political organization or nation. During the build-up to 2015 presidential election in Nigeria, voters seem to have been influenced by the brand personality of the two prominent candidates that vied for the exalted office. The candidates of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP), former President Goodluck and erstwhile Military Head of State, General Buhari, now the current president of Nigeria had brand personality attached to them by voters. Whether such brand personality persuasions were true or false depend on individual voter’s observation, beliefs and evaluation of information at his disposal.

Brand knowledge is made from individual pieces of information that link together in memory to form more complex associative networks (Wyer and Srull, 1989). Information is recalled from memory when a node is stimulated from rest by a process known as activation (de Groot, 1989) cited in Smith [30]. This scenario played out by the stimulus of seeing either the president Jonathan or General Buhari on television which activates in the memory other associations such as the PDP, the largest political party in Africa or APC, the change we need/ the change mantra party—the biggest, strong opposition party in Nigeria. All these seem to play great role in voters’ choice of candidate and decision on whom to vote for or not. Different advertising campaigns preceding the 2015 presidential election presented or painted the personality of Goodluck Jonathan and Buhari using their antecedents and approach to issues.

Voters were meant to internalize these personality portraits and reflect them in their choices. Personality is defined as “the set of meanings constructed by an observer to describe the ‘inner characteristics of another person’” (Allen and Olson, 1995, p.392), and brand personality is “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand”. Assessing from a consumer learning perspective, it is viewed that the personality of a political party is seen as “an associative network of the human characteristics relating to that party held in memory and accessible when stimulated from the memory of a voter[30]. In sum, the personality of the political party and its politicians are not separate but amalgamated to form an associative network in memory of the overall brand.

4. Strand III: Theoretical Foundation

There are a large number of studies that have attempted to explain voter choice and decision from behavioural standpoint/approach. These studies tried to focus on different theories or theoretical constructs in offering explanation on voters’ decision making and choice within the socio-politico milieu. Some of the theories include the spatial voting theory, the saliency theory of party competition, the public choice theory and rational choice theory. These theories are tangentially discussed in such a way that they present facts connecting voter decision, choice and voting patterns.

The spatial voting theory and saliency theory provide theoretical approaches to study electoral competition among parties [2]. Spatial theory of voting assumes that parties ‘formulate policies in order to win elections’ [6],[2] and compete by taking different positions along a set of issues. The application of this notion within the voting choice framework indicates that ‘voters with a particular position on an issue is closer to their’. The theory, therefore, considers that politicians know voters’ preferences, and electors are informed about party policies; polls give information about preferences to parties and media and party manifestos give information about party policies to the electorate [6]. The spatial voting theory has come under criticisms given that it ignores two basic problems: (i) failure to resolve whether policies are consistent with the ideological stance of the party, and (ii) the capacity of the party to produce the desired outcomes with the right policies [35]. The bottom-line of this theory as regards the voter choice and decision making is that voters’ choice and decision is influenced by their beliefs and expectations which are reinforced by a political party or government’s position or stand, policies. Though, spatial voting theory is widely applied in political science studies yet it offers theoretical underpinning that seems to widen the understanding of consumer behaviour applications in political marketing domain.

The Saliency theory is one of the most influential accounts to explain the mechanics in party competition and provides one of the theoretical frameworks for explaining voter decisions in political marketing arena. It’s core assumption claims that parties compete by selective issue emphasis and by direct confrontation (Budge, 1982, cited in Tolosa & Gracia,[2]. Unlike the Downs postulations on spatial theory, saliency theory suggests that parties do not really alter their issue positions when they are competing for elections, rather they are selectively emphasizing or
de-emphasizing issues of their policy inventory [44]. In their study, Harmel and associates [45] assert that “the extent to which these issues are emphasized in a party manifesto indicates their salience’ in the platform and thus to the electorate”. With such assertion, therefore, it could be seen that saliency theory is based on a specific understanding of voting behaviour and strongly relies on the concept of issue ownership’. It can also be argued that parties focus their emphasis on issues they own and that certain parties are perceived by voters as being more competent than their opponents in a specific policy area.

The arguments presented in the saliency theory could guide some category of voters (e.g. the educated voters) to probe the ‘saliency score’ of certain policy issues in a party’s manifesto and used such probe as a basis for making informed decision concerning supporting a political party or not. The ‘saliency score’ is the rate of mentions that a particular policy receives in a given party manifesto. Hence, a high saliency score indicates that the issue is relevant for the party [46].

Another theory that gives direction to understanding voter choice and decision making is the public choice theory. Public choice theory is an economic theory developed by James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock(1964) to try to explain how public decisions are made[47]. It involves “the interactions of the voting public, the politicians, the bureaucracy and political action committee”. It also relates to how much choice the public has in the economic decisions taken by a government. The public does not have a single preference, but many different preferences which can not at all be reflected in a government economic policy. This theory provides the link between what the voter expects from the government/political party in power. If government does not interact with the citizenry in order to know their feelings and integrate them into mainstream policy choice and decisions, voters tend to show their anger by not voting the government again or political party for another term. There is the rational choice theory which supposes that individuals make their electoral decision in keeping with their own self-interest, undertaking a cost-benefit analysis. This theory is connected to the issue of developing a voting behaviour theory that is more aligned with modern political exchange phenomena. The rational choice theory is examined in detail in the section that follows, and it is adopted as the theoretical framework for the article.

4.1. The Rational Choice Theory

This theory was propounded by one of the leading exponents of the economic rational school, Downs in 1957. The theory is claimed to be the prevailing view in political science today[8], [5],[1]. It is adopted here as a theoretical framework guiding discussions on this article; it provides adequate insights into what effect voters’ perceptions, attitude or behaviour have on voters’ choice and electoral decisions within the consumer-oriented marketing paradigm. Rational choice provides a series of analytic models through which ontological implications can be derived, and predictions made. Yet, the political marketing approach seeks to build upon orthodox rational choice accounts, by introducing a normative element to this perspective, prescribing the internalisation of these assumptions in order to achieve the desired objective [7].

Rational choice theory can be adapted in varying marketing contexts; for example, Dean and Croft have explored it in relation to understanding consumer decision making and electoral behaviour [5]. Williamson [48], and Nelson [49] have demonstrated its relevance in commercial sector. Downs [6] in 1957 x-rayed rational choice in politics in his classic study on economic rationality arguing that rationality is measured by how the electorate “strives for what they desire, or at least act as if they were pursuing some end”. Here, there is no room for emotion or other variables that could affect the instrumental processing of the information. As mirrored in the wider consumer research literature, voters simply weigh the benefits and costs associated with their own individual gains. Taking from political perspective, Downs [6] rational behaviour could be clouded by secondary emotional factors. Further explanation presented by Downs clearly explained a model or notion of the process of voting. Some scholars say Downs’s rationality lack adequate explanation of why people actually vote given little empirical evidence to support his thesis [49]. Udehn [49] argued that it may not be really easy for one to decide what issues motivate voters when deciding what is in their self interest. He noted that “other considerations are at work may be more decisive”. Another angle of criticism of rational choice theory is the issue of altruism. Within the instrumental rationality theory, it is not rational to look at others’ interests unless they are of direct or indirect benefit to the individual making the decision [5].

Some of the issues raised above which dominated early rational choice literature could not satisfactorily account for why people vote and how they come to their final decision [50]. However, in
the later rational choice literature, those inadequacies were addressed through added variables to the existing model. Other variables such as small changes in costs and benefits alter the turn out decision for many voters; and for the majority of voters “costs are usually low in a standard election” [51]. In a keenly contested election, “this notion changes the stakes and the notion of the strategic politician is then introduced that focuses more on marginal seats where there is a greater propensity for the voter to turnout”.

5.1 Caveats of Voters’ Choice and Decision
To effectively explicate rational choice theory there are three caveats we need to x-ray. These are issues of information processing, rationality and irrationality notions or stance.

5.2 Information processing notion and its application in Voter choice and Decision making
As alluded in preceding sections, information processing is crucial in voter choice and decision making process. The voter who needs to make electoral decision in terms of choosing a candidate among other competitors or cast vote for a political party needs information. He/she can search for information if it’s not readily available. Voters need to examine both the political party and politicians and collect information to enable them reasonable or informed decision based on their own self-interest. An early study on information provision warns against mass of information that bombards the voter through advertising and other media of communication. The voter may find it difficult to evaluate this avalanche of information; he/she resolves this problem by identifying with a political party that shares same ideology with him/her. Researchers like Miller, Brickman and Bolen (1986) argued that “it is irrational for voters to examine all the information that comes their way on a daily basis” [52].

Some studies have focused on how voters search and order available information, Zaller, [53], Granberg [54] had focused on how perceptions of issues affected voting intentions; Carpini and Keeter[56], and Gomez and Willison [55] studied the concept of sophistication and how the level of political sophistication can impact the search and evaluation aspect of processing that leads to the voting decision. Providing more insights into this aspect, Zaller[53] notes that “voters with high and low levels of awareness of political issues are unlikely to be swayed from their decision to vote or abstain”. He further argued that “its members of the electorate with moderate levels of political awareness who are more likely to be influenced by campaign messages”. This may not be totally true given the several ways campaign messages are delivered via political advertising, word of mouth and other persuasive platforms.

5.3 Rationality Stance
The notion of rationality as applied here is aimed at evaluating electoral behaviour and other actions of the aggregate voters. Beside its purpose in this article, “the concept of rationality as used in philosophical and sociological analysis differs from the meaning assigned to it in rational choice theory” [5]. Within other climes, rationality bears different interpretation of teleological rationality that focuses on means rather than goal [5]. At some point, philosophy agrees with economic theory particularly where rational choice suggests a logical progression of decision making. This is exemplified when a person makes a decision, he/she evaluates alternatives and progress through a series of steps toward the final decision. Again as noted by Dean & Croft [5], rational thought is consistent; if a person were faced with the same alternatives at a later period, he or she would follow the same pattern and reach the same decision”. From this point, rationality concepts differ from instrumental rationality.

However, the rationality concepts as applied in the economic rational choice theory presents an idea whereby all voters are rational in they have reasons to behave in a rational way. This may not really be so in some political environments where majority of citizenry are not educated or lack knowledge of the workings of government or its policies. In Nigeria, some election commentators have reported that there was strong evidence indicating that many voters had in the past shown lack of reasoning in making electoral decisions. For example, William (2016) in an interview with political correspondent of TVC News, noted that voters seemed to be irrational in their voters decision, “some do not apply reasoning to determine the benefits of supporting a particular candidate or party”.

Rationality has levels that impact people’s interpretation of issues or situations. Each situation can determine the level of rationality, while the capability of the individual determines the extent of reasoning. There is the communicative rationality which anchors on communication between actors which then leads to their actions. This aspect has teleological process; its component is the dimension of critical reasoning. Critical reasoning brings to fore the need for people to engage in systemic thought process when faced with choice
and decision dilemma. Critical reasoning allows for placing side by side alternatives and evaluating their cost-benefit and opportunity cost of taking a 'yes or 'no decision'.

5.4 Irrationality Stance

Irrationality is the opposite of rationality. It has played out in different ways in voter choice and decisions. A number of criteria that demonstrate irrationality have been noted [58]. Habermas [58] had argued that rather than defending opinions with critical reasoning, an irrational voter (person) would respond inappropriately with stereotypical opinions and little cognitive norms such as institutionalized beliefs accepted within their own social class or culture without the capacity of critical reasoning. The irrationality stance practically played out in the discussions trailing the arrest of High Court judges in Nigeria by Department of State Security Services (DSS). The Nigerian Bar Association members were divided over the issue; while some did not allow reasoning to take place before taking side, others irrationally relied on news paper reports and self opinionated arguments to make their own comments. If a person does not think through the arguments but makes dogmatic assertions through either a lack of consideration or interest, this is considered as irrational.

Two components of irrationality were identified by Aristotle: Vegetative and desiderative irrationality. A vegetative irrationality is stimulated by instincts, which are basic subconscious drives where there is no reasoning. It is closely aligned to Freud’s classical work on conditioning. The desiderative irrationality component is more complex as reasoning takes place, which is limited to a sense of obedience to authority. This also leads to conscious progression, which is influenced by a course of reward and punishment that can determine the individual’s behaviour through a learning process.

5. Strand IV: Methodology

The research design used in the study was a mixed research design comprising exploratory research method and qualitative method. The exploratory design was based on critical review of literature to identify scholarly comments and positions on voter choice and decisions within the framework of exchange and Marketing (consumer) orientation paradigms. This was balanced with views or opinions of some political commentators interviewed by the researchers. This mixed research design was adopted in order to present a balanced argument between the existing literature and what practically obtains in Nigeria political landscape.

6. Strand V: Discussion on Voter Choice and Decision in Nigeria Political Landscape

In the second strand of this article the concepts of voter choice and decision making were explored within the context of consumer behaviour and consumer-oriented marketing. This section balances various arguments that were presented in the preceding sections with views or opinions of political marketing practitioners and political commentators. Voter decision anchor on making choice among alternatives under certain condition after evaluating or not information provided. Voting decision in Nigeria just like many other pluralistic societies appears to be motivated by different reasons. While some of the motivating factors appeared to be rational others seem to be triggered by irrationality notions.

In spite of some scholarly studies on the pattern of voter choice and what actually motivates voter behaviour, there are evidence-based explanations that are useful in expanding the knowledge of voter decisions. In an interview of selected political commentators, Williams Erick, an election observer in 2015 general elections in Nigeria noted with mixed feeling different voting choice patterns. According to Erick “some voters do not have defined their interest in the political process and because of this, shows tendencies of irrationality in their voting behaviour”. Another political commentator tends to sum up this irrationality stance thus: ‘a close observation of some uninformed voters during the presidential election showed an exhibition of non-challant attitude... a significant number of this category did emotional voting’. Emotional voting is not based on reasoning. Emotion is a component of irrationality. In consumer behaviour emotion has been found to be a motivator in consumer purchase decision.

It does also appears that some segment of voters in the last 2015 presidential election and gubernatorial elections voted based on ethnic motivated interests. This group of voters, perhaps, did evaluate their candidates based on what they think they will gain from their candidates for belonging to the same ethnic group. This ethnic-led voter posture or behaviour more or less, prior to the election played out by agitation of some people who thought it was their time to hold power at the centre. This is summed up by the North-South...
political dichotomy as noted by one political commentator thus: “the issue of North-South political dichotomy has given rise to voters taken decision to vote for a candidate from their ethnic extraction or geopolitical zone”. Whether this kind of decision has element of rationality or irrationality depend on the voters' evaluation of political messages of candidates. Perhaps, if the political communication messages and promises of the candidate reinforce the voters self interest, their action may be seen as being rational. However, if they voted or supported a candidate without any critical reasoning rather than on ethnic sentiments, it then means that they are irrational in their voting decision. Voting along ethnic chufunism alters principles of critical reasoning where nationalism and patriotism are being preached as a bind force for peace and unity to thrive.

Studies have shown that voters can switch loyalty or support based on their evaluation of political advertising of a candidate or political party [10],[4],[25]. Voters’ choice of candidate for an election significantly changes when presented with more believable facts by opponent’s advertising messages [25].This played out in 2015 Governorship election in Imo State, Nigeria. Also an independent poll conducted by Election Observatory in February 2015 indicated that potential voters switched loyalty from party A to party B based on some attack ad targeted at candidate’s personality or past antecedents. (Both Party A and Party B are names substituted for the real names of the parties sampled in that poll). While party A’s candidate was leading with a significant percent in the pre-election poll and after being exposed to some documentaries and other print and broadcast political advertisement Party B’s candidate closed the gap and now led with additional 5 percent(Election Observatory,2015)

The above observation or finding lends credence to the ‘limited effects theory’. The limited effects’ theory assumes that the voting public uses the media for information in the context of what they know from other sources—such as direct contact, friends, opinion leaders etc. These pre-existing and more or less independent impressions are believed to constituted powerful influences with which media images must contend in the competition for influencing the voters’ view of the candidates. Research by Olujide, Adeyemi and Gbadeyan [60], it was found out in the gubernatorial election keenly contested by two dominant parties, Action Congress(AC) and Peoples Democratic Party(PDP), electorate voted based on personality(36%) followed by those that voted based on party affiliation. The study also indicated that most of the voters got the information they needed for voting from political campaigns and speeches (44%), especially those who were party loyalist and some electorates who are undecided but are looking for information that would enable them make a rightful political choice.

6.1 Utilizing Rational Choice Theory by Market-Oriented Parties to Influence Voter Informed Decisions and Choice

As a research area, political marketing has grown beyond communication and campaigns designed by political advertisers and political parties. It is now a growing phenomenon which is applied in varying context to study observed changes in the way parties responded to market research and in how they can adopt a market orientation approach in winning elections and run government successfully[65],[29],[4],[64]. There is a growing research interest in the extent to which parties adopt a market orientation to help them sell themselves and gain control of government by meeting needs of the political markets or tailoring offerings/political products —to suit market demands. A market orientation in politics has been the subject of significant research because it offers a potentially successful approach to winning elections.

A number of scholars have defined and modelled a market orientation in politics, including Lees-Marshment (2001), Newman (1994 & 1999), and Ormrod (2005). The underlying principles are that a market orientation involves the politician or party being in touch with and responsive to ordinary voter concerns. From this perspective, a “Market-Oriented Party uses party views and political judgment to design its behaviour to respond to and satisfy voter demands in a way that meets their needs and wants, supported and implemented by the internal organisation, and is deliverable in government”. Parties may use their ideology as a means to create effective solutions to public demands, but party elites try to respond to market demand, rather than trying to shape opinion. Obviously not all parties use marketing to inform product design; some parties mainly use it to inform communication. Arising from this explanatory framework, Lees-Marshment noted two alternative party types: product-oriented parties (POPs) and sales-oriented parties (SOPs). The former (POPs) being more traditional while SOPs “aim to sell what they decide is best for the people by utilising effective political marketing communication techniques. Market intelligence is used not to inform the product design, but to help the party persuade voters it is right.” In this aspect, communication is designed in conjunction with
results from market intelligence and integrated with marketing techniques, such as target marketing and direct mail. However, “with the market-oriented party, identifying voters’ needs and wants comes before a party determines how to behave. Although judgment and ideology is still used to inform the development of solutions in a market-oriented party, elites respond to market demand, rather than trying to shape it” [65].

A market-oriented party can leverage on principles of choice theory by offering to the political market an ideological-based products via its party manifestos. The party has a duty to sell its programme to all strata of the voting public and from market research evaluates the responses of the voters to its offerings. Since the tenet of MOPs anchors on responding to voter demands and satisfying them, the concept consumerism needs an urgent attention here. Voters do not live in isolation, to a reasonable extent they matter in every sphere of politics.

An informed citizenry is an asset to a democracy that values opinions of people for better governance and effective leader-follower relationship. For this reason, therefore, Achor (2011) contends that “citizenship can exist within a consumer culture, and consumerism in politics can create avenues for the public to take on civic qualities, including accepting responsibility to shape their own lives”. The citizens or voters are the consumers of political products; they should decide or determine what they want from the political parties and government. Hence, this brings us to the issue of consumerism. Consumerism may encourage voters to demand that parties and politicians ensure they have governing capability and that political promises be costed and realistic. However, this can be good for government and ensure that politics is about what is delivered and changed not just what is promised in an election campaign. Such line of thought could help influence voters subsequent electoral decisions, which may result to majority of non-compromised voters pitching their tent with the party for keeping her promises and actualizing its programmes in specific areas of the economy.

Although, there may be ill-feelings towards what the elites and other key party stakeholders may think concerning voters proper involvement in the party’s style of determining their needs. As observed by “we may worry that if political elites ask voters what they want, voters will answer selfishly, broader frameworks of consultation may produce a more balanced response that is in the interests of the community, not just the individual”. As noted in some political circles, “utilizing deliberative democracy forms of consultation could help ensure that marketing in government supports, rather than threatens, the traditional representative relationship” [65]. Today, in Nigeria democracy, elected leaders and politicians have adopted town hall meetings and other voter-engagement platforms where electorate of a particular electoral constituency interact with their representative at both local and national level and at same time field questions concerning constituents’ expectations and demands from government.

The fact expressed above lends credence to deliberative political theory, which focuses on “deliberation rather than voting and . . . considers opinion and will-formation before voting; and can be an expansion of representative democracy and aggregation of interest” Marshment and Winter, 2009). “Deliberative democracy involves a range of methods, including citizen juries, national deliberation days, local parliaments, neighbourhood initiatives, and citizen panels. “Deliberative mechanisms offers further strengths in facilitating the efficacy of local knowledge, and where training or information is provided, may mitigate some of the weaknesses in mass public knowledge and understanding compared to elites. Deliberative theory of politics may therefore offer greater insight into how governments can consult the public, [and] make that consultation more worthwhile, both theoretically and in terms of practice”. The integration of consultation into government within a market-oriented framework is a sure way to influence voter decision and participation in governance.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

This conceptual article has yielded to the call for political marketing practitioners and scholars to integrate interdisciplinary methodologies or concepts in studying certain phenomena such as voter choice and decision making, etc. From the discussions, it is clear that voter decision making is multifaceted especially in Nigeria political environment where there are multi-party system and cultural diversity. Some voters demonstrate evidence of irrationality while some others show evidence of irrationality in their electoral or political decisions. Some individuals appear to weigh or evaluate the mass information provided on cost-benefit analysis scale while some others appear to make electoral decisions on party affiliation and loyalty. Personality of candidates in an election plays a prominent role in voter choice of candidate and voting decisions.
In spite of all these factors, critical reasoning seems to be a key component in rational choice and decision making. The reason being that the decision maker places side by side alternatives and evaluates their values and opportunity cost and takes a decision. The issues discussed in the article give credence to voter-behaviour and consumer-oriented marketing paradigm. A market orientation in politics has been the subject of significant research because it offers a potentially successful approach to winning elections. Market-Oriented Party uses party views and political judgment to design its behaviour to respond to and satisfy voter demands in a way that that meets their needs and wants. Parties in Nigeria are advised to use their ideology as a means to create effective solutions to public demands and built that into their party manifestos but ensure that promises made are delivered to the electorate or the citizenry. Political parties should use marketing to inform product design; reinforce voters’ loyalty and support.

A market-oriented party can leverage on principles of choice theory by offering to the political market an ideological-based products via its party manifestos. The party has a duty to sell its programme to all strata of the voting public and from market research evaluates the responses of the voters to its offerings. And since the tenet of MOPs anchors on responding to voter demands and satisfying them, the concept of consumerism needs to be imbued by political parties to value an urgent attention here. Voters do not live in isolation, to a reasonable extent they matter in every sphere of politics; their choice and electoral decisions matter if political parties and their candidates must gain their support.

In this line of reasoning, political parties are responsive to their electorate by strategically emphasising policy issues that are currently salient in the minds of voters to reap electoral gains. Above all, political parties and governments should provide constant platforms that give the electorate or the citizenry the reasons to continually to decision in favour of their policies and programmes.

8. References


[64] Lees-Marshment, J. (2004). The political marketing revolution, Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press


Notes on Researchers

Nwachukwu C.P. is a lecturer in the Department of Marketing Abia State Polytechnic Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. His doctoral interest is on Political Marketing. He has authored several articles published in referred journals.

Achor, Prince N. is on the verge of receiving his PhD in Public Relations. He is a Media, Public Relations & Marketing Communication Consultant with experience spanning over fifteen years. P.N. Achor holds both M.Sc(PR) and MBA (Marketing) Degrees from the prestigious University of Nigeria Nsukka. In 2012, he authored a flagship book in Political Marketing that centred on Nigeria political terrain; he has also published several learned articles in referred journals.

Nkwocha, Charles is lecturer in the Department of Marketing, Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo, Imo State. He is an astute researcher with penchant for researching on political and social issues. He also has a number of articles to his credit.

Okwara Chinedu is a lecturer in the Department of Marketing, Imo State Polytechnic, Umuagwo, Imo State. He has published widely in learned journals; His research interest cuts across social marketing and product development strategy.