

## **Relationship marketing in the Political Process, its impact**

<sup>1</sup>Victor .O. Ogunbiyi, <sup>2</sup>Kufre Daniel Inyang

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Marketing, School of Business Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa

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**Abstract:** *The scope of the marketing concept has been expanding rapidly. It races with the modern society and incorporating many ideas and proved itself as a dynamic research subject matter. Both relationship marketing and political marketing are of contemporary issues and comparatively new wings of the marketing domain. Like other business organizations, political parties/institutions are also using relationship marketing and trying to incorporate into the political marketing.*

*The purpose of this study is to investigate the influences of the relationship marketing in determining voter intention and to identify the effective political-market segmentation. Thus a model is proposed and one of the results of using the model will be the more efficient use of funds in allocating the political marketing budget*

**Keywords:** *Political Marketing, Voter, Trust, Relationship Marketing*

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### **I. Introduction**

The scope of the marketing concept has been expanding rapidly (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008; Lilleker, 2005; Newman, 1994). In particular relationship marketing (RM) and political marketing (PM) are examples of contemporary issues and comparatively new wings of the marketing domain. RM is now a clearly defined and essential component of any business development and customer retention program (Cwalina, Falkowski and Newman, 2010; Butler and Collins, 1999; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). The applications of marketing theory to politics are focusing more on value creation to build sustainable relationship with the stakeholders. Here politicians or candidates offer service and voters (electorate) are treated as customers. Many political parties/institutions are attempting to incorporate the theme of RM into their campaigns. A number of scholars have argued that political campaigning has become professionalized, and that PM has become the new dominant campaign paradigm (Stromback, 2007; Lilleker and Lees-Marshment, 2005). As the nature of the relationship is volatile and the optimum feed-back is dependent of its proper nurture, politicians could benefit from a better understanding of the RM theme in the PM domain.

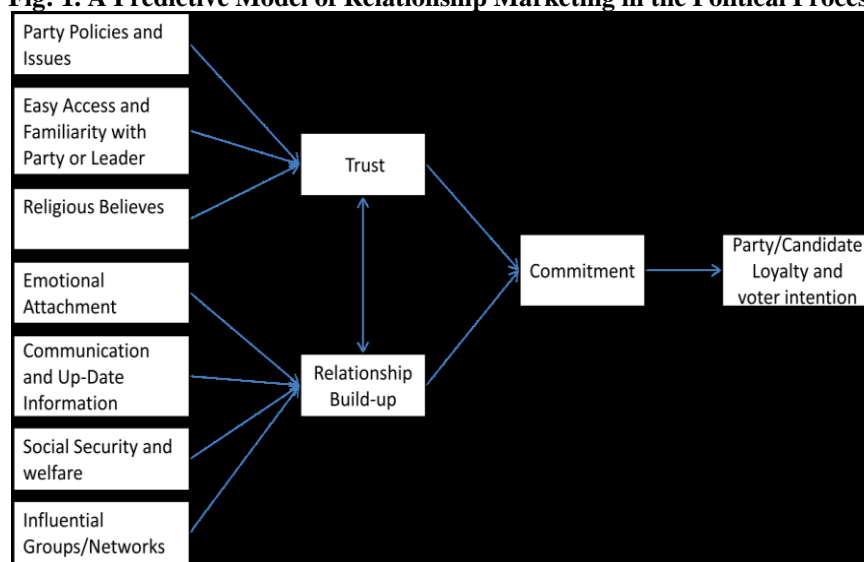
One of the main objectives to utilize the marketing theme into the political domain is to develop long-term relationships with the party/leaders and stakeholders. Thus it can be said that, the theme of RM can be used to contribute to sculpture and enrich PM domain. Despite the amplifying influence of RM approach, however, little application of RM theory and research is incorporated into the study of the PM process (Stromback *et al*, 2010).

The purpose of this conceptual study is to develop a political relationship marketing (PRM) model to identify the salient antecedents of party/candidate loyalty and voter intention. This model could be utilised in the political domain by informing political market segments for its (PRM) effective and sustainable development. This could further advance our knowledge in PM and RM and direct in developing efficient PM budget.

### **II. Towards Developing a Model**

The concept of RM is not being well informed in the PM arena so far (Bannon, 2003) and needs to be addressed (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Therefore it would be advantageous to test the contribution of relationship to a political campaign. This paper seeks to develop the model shown in figure 1, focuses on identifying the antecedents of voter intentions and integrates relationship marketing theory into the model.

**Fig: 1. A Predictive Model of Relationship Marketing in the Political Process**



### Party Policies and Issues

A leader in a democracy needs to persuade their party, the parliament, and the public of the need of a political party for the policies being advocated. These policy goals will provide information that voters can take into account at election time (Curtis, 2009). Policy on social issues, foreign issues, racial issues and political efficacy are related to political trust and commitment (Miller, 1974) while political trust depends on credible policy making (Blind, 2007). The voting public is becoming more skeptical of politics and more disconnected from political parties in advanced industrial democracies (Dermody, Hanmer-Lloyd, and Scullion, 2010; Dermody, and Hanmer-Lloyd, 2005; Dalton, 2000). Because of complex policies and the extended number of political issues, voters feel reluctant with participating in such political process (Granato, and Sunny Wong, 2004; Caldwell and Hayes, 2007). Constructing effective party slogan, souvenirs can form solidarity with voters (Koc and Ilgun, 2010; Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Thus, there should have been a unique, clear and simple party policy for each political party so that voter can compare those and feels a kind of attachment which may lead to create political trust. In other words, voters' positive feelings or attachment towards a political party or a leader is dependent on authentic, unique and simple policies and issues being advocated (Koc and Ilgun, 2010; Curtis, 2009). Therefore H1 is proposed.

H1: Advocating simple, authentic and unique party policies and issues predicts voter attachment which turns into trust.

### Easy Access and Familiarity with Party or Leader

As democracy is still evolving in most of the countries (LeBeau, 2006; Abdrakhmanov, 2007) people can participate and contribute more in politics. Voters' easy access to leaders and chances to participate and contribute to policy making and to be heard could create political trustworthiness to a party or a party leader (Nelsen, Guth and Highsmith, 2011). Insider information and intimacy with party officials can also form trustworthiness (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Heide and John (1992) mentioned that, well understanding and familiarity with party or party leader can increase loyalty and helps in building relationship. Therefore H2 is proposed.

H2: Ease of access to party leaders/officials enables familiarity and subsequently predicts political trust.

### Religious Beliefs

Religion itself creates a complication in political life as its value and rule is considered superior than to democratic proposition and freedom to choose (Nelsen, Guth and Highsmith, 2011). That is why many scholars suggest not to include religious matter into politics (Norris and Inglehart, 2004; Strenski, 2010). However, research shows religious factors are still influencing and affecting the political affairs (Pellikaan, 2010; Strenski, 2010; Newport, 2011). Least developed and developing countries are still embedded by sacred orientations whereas, advanced industrial nations are moving toward more secular orientations (Pellikaan, 2010). Empirical evidence shows that politicians in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Israel, Ireland and in many other countries are able to create trust by propagating religious beliefs. Newport (2011) found 62% very religious white Americans identified as Republicans compared with 28% who recognised themselves as Democrats. Furthermore, religion

is a spiritual feature and embedded by faith and emotion which cause developing trust with political party/leader (Pellikaan, 2010). Therefore H3 is proposed.

H3: Differences in religions and their (voter) practising level can lead to trust in specific party/candidate.

### **III. Emotional Attachment**

Voters may not act rationally in every aspect during selecting a leader or a candidate (Wattenberg, 1987). Research by Aronson, Wilson and Akert (1999) concluded people tend to vote with their hearts rather than with their minds. In another research, Rose and McAllister (1990) argued, most voters' intentions are determined by parental voting behavior which could be diagnosed as emotional affiliation. Candidates' demographic factors, place of origin, previous activities, family tree and affiliation could also be liable to arouse emotional feelings which may lead in developing relationship with party/candidate (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2004; Izard 2001; Rose and McAllister, 1990). Therefore H4 is proposed.

H4: Voters various emotional attachments lead to develop relationship in specific party/candidate.

### **IV. Communication and Up-date Information**

Communication is the heart of political propaganda as well as campaign and needs to continue even after fulfilment the target (Koc and Ilgun, 2010; Caceres and Paparoidamis, 2007). This communication should target the audience, especially with a view to establish the political positioning of a party. Political party/leader would benefit if overall communications designs according to needs, demographic variables, values and attitudes of the constituency (Koc and Ilgun, 2010; Dann and Hughes, 2008). Politicians can communicate in the form of intimate dialogue with voters, speeches in public events or using mass media or internet with the update information which ultimately result in building relationship in the political process (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Therefore H5 is proposed.

H5: Quality and frequent communication along with up-date information lead to relationship development between voters and politicians.

### **V. Social Security and Welfare**

Much attention is currently being devoted to what sectors and in what extent political parties or governments are addressing social protection (Hudson, 2007). For example, pension scheme for the senior citizen, basic and acute health care service, family support benefit for the lower income group and single parents are parts of ensuring social security and welfare (Taylor-Gooby, 2011; Quadagno, 1984). The political parties or leaders who are more attached and supportive with social security procedure can lead in developing sustainable relationships (Quadagno, 1984). Caceres and Paparoidamis (2007) identified the quality of relationship is much dependent on the quality of service being provided. One recent study in job market shows that, if a party is more supportive to and ensure insiders (full time employee) job facility/security, can also attract outsiders (unemployed, casual, part-time employee) support (Emmenegger, 2009). For developing sustainable (political) relationship among stakeholders, party leaders or party professionals need to ensure value creation in cooperative and collaborative way (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and ensuring social welfare is a method of developing relationship (Wendt, 1995). This leads us to formulate 6th hypothesis.

H6: Levels of social security and welfare leads to develop relationship between political party/leader and voter.

### **VI. Influential Groups/Networks**

Political candidates mostly offer highly complex and intangible services that need different levels of networks to reach the voter this practically application to the Nigeria Political/ Economical developing society. When market is too big to reach individually for promoting goods/services, marketer uses networks to keep connected with consumers. Other than mass media, proper utilization of influential groups are considered very effective to develop sustainable relationship with consumers or voters (Henneberg and O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Sheth and Parvatiar (1995) revealed, "... because of personal influences, family influences, peer group influences, social influences, institutional influences; ... consumer acts in different ways to build up relations with marketer". Individuals possess a certain influential capacity within their social networks and can be used this qualities in developing relationship (Valentini, 2010; Pfeffer, 1992). Close, personal friends and casual friends have peer group influences, immediate and extended family members have family influences, co-workers, employees, work supervisors, or clients have social influence whereas church and civic organizations have institutional influences which cause in somewhat developing relationships among stakeholders (Smith, et. al., 2007; Pfeffer, 1992). Hence, politicians could utilise these influential factors to create and maintain relationship with voters. Therefore H7 is proposed.

H7: Various influential groups/networks can lead to develop relationship between political party/leader and voter.

## **VII. Trust**

A number of political and marketing professionals are utilizing the theme of relationship marketing in the political marketing arena to pursue and sustain voter-candidate relationship (Koc and Ilgun, 2010; Scammell, M., 1999; Bannon, 2003; O'Shaughnessy, 2001). For example, the relationship between trust and commitment and its use in the relationship marketing is well established (Ganesan, 1994) whilst political professionals are now trying to incorporate this theme into political domain (Dann, and Hughes, 2008).

In political contexts leaders' trustworthiness affects voter intentions and this personality profiling determines how their voters perceive it (De Landtsheer, De Vries and Vertessen, 2008). Scholars have identified that trustworthiness is a vital issue for political candidates to win voter support (Sherman, Schiffman and Thelen, 2008). Thus, trust may become a key issue for the politicians to identify how voter recognise this factor. Therefore H8 is proposed.

H8 (a): That trust has a positive effect on commitment in political domain.

(b): That trust lead to build up relationship between candidate and voter.

## **VIII. Commitment**

Similarly, commitment is an important factor in organisational buying behaviour which leads to decrease customer turnover (Porter et al., 1974) and create higher motivation and relationship (Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer, 1995; Farrell and Rusbult, 1981). Morgan and Hunt (1994) found that commitment and loyalty is positively related and encouraged repeated buying behaviour because of creation of relationship bond. However, it is not clear whether this relationship would work appropriately in the political domain. On the other hand, loyalty is described as "a deeply held commitment to re-buy or repurchase a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same-set purchasing" (Oliver, 1999, p. 34). Therefore H9 is proposed.

H9: That commitment leads to develop party/candidate loyalty and voter intention.

## **Relationship Build-up**

Bagozzi (1995) indicated that, consumers sometimes make decisions because of the degree of their relationship with other groups and individuals who surround them. Political marketing is all about service marketing and the nature of service is relationship based (Gronroos, 1995). Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer, (1995) identified commitment is one of the key factor in developing long-term relationship. Consumers/voters desire relationship partners that they can trust as trust is associated with partners' reliability and subsequently form integrity and loyalty (Hunt and Arnett, 2006). Research shows that, peer group influences and family influences are vital to guide in building relationship with politicians (Rose and McAllister, 1990). Thus the following hypothesis is proposed.

H10 (a): That building relationship leads to develop trust.

(b): That building relationship leads to enforce commitment.

## **IX. Party/Candidate Loyalty and Voter Intention**

In the political marketing context, a political-party and a voter could be recognized as an organization and a customer respectively. To attract voter attention and loyalty, political-parties have focused in building brand (party) loyalty (Dalton, 1996) as "loyal customers ... are the bedrock of any business" (Caruana 2002, p. 811). Wallenburg et al., (2011) found trust and commitment and sustainable relationship can play a vital role to form loyalty. This loyalty could further lead to settle voter intention toward party/candidate. Many researchers recognize that relationship marketing is now the dominant paradigm of marketing and the idea of developing relationship is simply a key antecedent of formation of customer/voter loyalty (Story and Hess, 2006; Moorman, Deshpande, and Zaltman, 1993; Wang, 2008).

Voter intention or actual voter behavior can be dependent on many factors. Bennett and Rundle-Thiele (2002) identified the outcome of loyalty is repeated purchase/action or intention (Guest, 1944). Personal benefit, social issues, party policies, communication and relationship, peer group influences are seen as important antecedents. However, all these factors help to develop or destroy trust and commitment and develop relationship which further influences customers/voters to be loyal. This loyalty could ultimately be liable to sculpture voter intention. The following hypotheses are therefore proposed.

H11: That commitment elevates loyalty and voter intention to a party/candidate.

## X. Conclusions

The relationship between political product, candidate and voter can be shaped by many aspects; however there is no overall framework to guide the interaction. Political marketing is a comparatively a new wing of the marketing domain and little theoretical frameworks for political marketing have been developed which has its own limitations. The theme of relationship marketing is seen to be closely relevant to the political marketing setting. Thus the theme of Morgan and Hunt's (1994) trust and commitment framework of relationship marketing can be utilized to develop a new political relationship marketing framework which we offered, could possibly be the basis of advancing further knowledge in political marketing domain in the academic settings. 7

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