SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT AND BRAND REPUTATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study empirically examined the relationship between social media engagement and brand reputation of political parties in Rivers State; adopting a survey research design. Data were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Population of the study comprised 3,215,273 eligible registered voters in Rivers State. Data were analyzed using Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0. Findings indicated that information sharing had a very strong positive and significant relationship with brand authority and brand advocacy. The study concluded that social media engagement is closely associated to brand reputation of political parties and serves as a veritable political marketing tool to gain political support from the voters in Rivers State. Amongst the recommendations are: efforts should be made in hiring trained social media managers who will be charged with the responsibility of drawing social media campaign plans and online brand building activities.

Keywords: Social media engagement, information sharing, Brand reputation, Brand authority, brand advocacy, political branding,

Introduction

Today, change in technology and dominance of the internet has resulted in rapid expansion of social media platforms; the world and specifically Nigerians are embracing internet with speed. Evidently, studies have revealed that there are more Nigerians going online everyday as over 70% of the country's population are recently using the internet. Same report also showed that Nigeria ranked 8 in the world internet users in 2014 (Pulse, 2019). Evidently, as at March to April 22, 2015, reports revealed 13.6 million tweets by 1.3million unique users in relation to Nigeria's presidential and state elections. Over 51% of Nigerian citizens were reported to have been using the internet in the election period (Bartlett, Krasodomski-Jones, Gondyi, Fisher & Jesperson, 2015). These data reveal a rapid growth of opportunities as a result of high development and adoption of social media by Nigerians. These developments and expansions are not only

traceable to the huge number of social media platforms ranging from Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat etc, but on the method of usage and the number of users. Accordingly, eMarketer (2013) revealed that over a quarter of the total world population uses social networking websites; and this number is predictable to reach over 2.55 billion people in 2017. The rapid growth in internet has proven to be bigger in 2019, 2020 and the future years to come for political and non-political organizations to build their brand reputation and command more loyalty.

The idea behind building reputation has for long being a matter of concern to Nigeria's political parties holding that their activities have mostly ended or resulted to violence, serious quarrel and other social vices at the detriment of the electorates which may have also negatively affected the image of Nigerian political parties and

its candidate. Evidently, Ogbeide (2012) noted that a study conducted in Nigeria holds that youths constitute 90-95% executors of these political violent acts in the country. These political violent acts have succeeded in ruing the states and the nation's political brand reputation. Thus, majority of citizens within and outside the country has a negative perception about Nigeria's politics as it is tagged a "dirty game." These leads to arson, war, kidnaps, violence, killings, bombing etc which act as impediments to global brand image of political parties and the development of the nation at large. Observably, these abominable acts are reported to be affiliated to cultism and political power tussle between present and past political leaders. Supportively, studies conducted by Egobueze and Ojirika (2017) noted that since 1922 Clifford's constitution as the beginning of election practices in Nigeria, the first recorded electoral violence happened in 1964. This was a battle between Awolowo and Akintola in the western region which was named "Operation Wetie" that led to first military coup in 1966. This election violence did not tell a good story about Nigeria. Importantly, a state like Rivers State that is blessed with natural resources is still sluggish in development as a result of violent-related acts that tend to scare away investors and other agents of national development. Brand image building for political parties have for long being considered as strategic management cause and fundamental task (Kavanagh 1995, Kotler, & Kotler 1999). Reputation of political parties and its candidates have being measured in terms of negative reputations which characterizes inflexibility, narrow-mined, lack of respect, whereas the positive brand reputations are viewed based on sensible policies, patriotism, trust, etc (Smith 2001). Shandwick (2012) asserted that attention given to reputation has gotten into new dimensions. Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker, and Bloching (2013) noted that it is essential for organizations to manage their brands with major aim of gaining positive brand reputation. Brand reputation could affect how an organization is treated, including loyalty of the public, the decision to support the organization and feelings (Aaker, 1991). The quest to build reputation of political parties gave rise to political communication which have being on a traditional basis before the arrival of information communication technology (ICT), social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and lots more; the arrival of technological-based political communication provided means for interactions and communication between political parties and the public (Ediraras, Rahayu, Natalina, & Widya, 2013).

Furthermore, Pontes, Henn, and Griffiths (2018) conducted a focus study in Britain and Portugal and found that there is lack of better understanding of what constitute political engagements especially by the youths. Hence, the preliminary reviews show that most researchers like Gangloff (2018), Lilleker and Jackson (2010), and Rupin (2015), have not deemed it necessary to empirically investigate the relationships and effects of social media engagement on brand reputation of political parties in Rivers State. Therefore, the current study seeks to bridge this knowledge gap which also serves a point of departure.

Research Problem

Observably, Nigeria's political brand took an ugly shape since the election violence that began at an early stage of her independence and has remained at an increased rate. Supportively, Alemika (2008) observed that the Nigerian politicians are becoming less accommodating, more abusive and too desperate to take over political seats. These mal practices and election vices are neither in anyway been beneficial to the brand reputation of Nigerian political parties nor adding to its national development. Further, Hemantkumar and Roshni (2018) observed that political branding is facing lots of rising problems like low voter turnout and loyalty, increased electorates' cynicism or selfishness, rapid media attention. A fall of parties' brand reputation has led

to negative brand recall, low brand advocacy, poor brand authority, and rapid party switching. Hence, a study on social media engagement and brand reputation in the context of political parties in Rivers State becomes a necessity.

Aim of the Study

The Aim of this study is to empirically examine the relationship between social media engagement and brand reputation of political parties in Rivers State. Other objectives includes to:

i.   investigate the relationship between information sharing and brand authority of political parties in Rivers State.

ii. empirically examine the relationship between information sharing and brand advocacy of political parties in Rivers State.

iii. ascertain the moderating effect of perceived-ease-of-use on the relationship between social media engagement and brand reputation of political parties in Rivers State.

Research Hypotheses

Premised on the research questions, the following hypotheses are formulated thus:

H_{o1}: Information sharing does not significantly relate with brand authority of political parties in Rivers State.

H_{o2}: Information sharing does not significantly relate with brand advocacy of political parties in Rivers State.

Theoretical Frameworks

Every concept in the field of marketing and social science at large are anchored on certain proven and accepted theories, proposition and models. Hence, this study is anchored on the following the uses and gratification theory (UGT) which is used to explain the reasons behind peoples' active request and use of specific media to meet particular needs (Katz & Foulkes, 1962). The UGT became popular as researchers became interested in understanding why audiences engaged with various forms of media, such as giving listening ears to the radio and reading the newspaper (Wimmer & Dominick, 1994). Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005) stated that the UGT expresses how individuals select media that

satisfies their needs, and enabling them to achieve gratifications. These gratifications could include knowledge expansion, entertainment and relaxation, social interaction and reward or remuneration. In order words, on a social media setting; UGT tends to explain the psychology behind the choice of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, etc as an online community.

Importantly, one needs to understand that each social media platform has its unique nature which also influences the attitudes of the users or participants. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram involves sharing of videos and pictures of personal life. The platform makes it easy for fun an entertainment which also shapes the attitudes of the users. Unlike the aforementioned, Twitter and LinkedIn have more formal and professional feature which influences the users in sharing more of corporate contents. Further, previous studies as Smock, Ellison, Lampe, and Wohn (2011) revealed that audience seek and find different gratifications within media content which influence their consumption of the content. For instance, Rubin (1983) opined that entertainment and information gratifications via television content or programmes add to substantial increases in the degree of television view. Similarly, Smock, Ellison, Lampe, and Wohn (2011) opined that UGT perspective has currently been used to forecast specific behaviors with regards to consumers' motivations for using social media sites. Malthouse, Haenlein, Skiera, Wege, and Zhang (2013) opined that in social media, organizations' objective is to attract users by creating value (i.e. *gratification*) via content production. They stated that content must therefore be designed in a manner that creates value for individual users or consumers to build a stronger level of engagement and enhance value outcomes. Similarly, adopting the UGT in political marketing; calls for creating valuable political contents in social media platforms to provide knowledge, increased political awareness and participation.

Further, in a bid to clarify the idea behind the UGT; Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, and Goodman (2015) identified some constructs that theoretically underpins the theory. They include: need for social relationship or interaction, information seeking and sharing, desire for rewards etc which have been explored in relation to peoples' choices for social media activities. Also, social media contents have been categorized into four categorized such as: (i) informational content- The degree to which the social media content provides resourceful and helpful information for the users (Chen, Clifford, and Wells, 2002). (ii) Entertaining content- The degree to which the social media content is fun to the users (Eighmey & McCord, 1998). (iii) Remunerative content- These includes some kind

of rewards such as incentives, gifts etc (Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit, 2011). (iv) Relational content- These includes the users need for social interaction while accessing the social media (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). In other words, the relational content is desired by users who desire sense of community, bond and closer relationship. Political parties could as well utilize these variant forms of content especially the relational content to attract voters or electorates that are passionate about community building. Hence, the uses and gratification theory has been adopted as a theory underpinning the current study. The current researchers presented diagram below to capture the idea of UGT based on the review of literature.
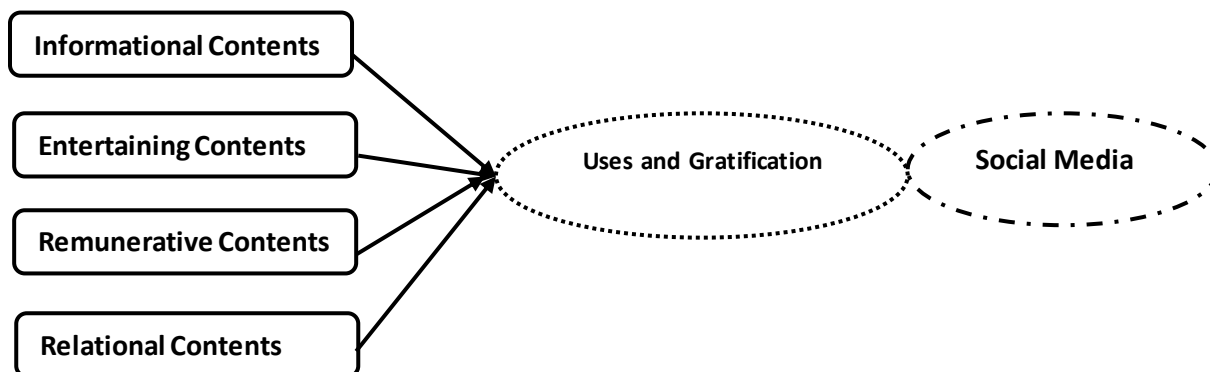

Fig 2.1: Basic Constructs of Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) in relation to Social
　　　　 Media
Source: Desk research, 2019 as adapted from Clifford, and Wells, 2002

Concept of Social Media Engagement

The term social media is defined as web sites and applications that allow users to create and share content or to get involved in social networking activities (Merriam-Webster, 2015). Generally, the concept of social media involves gathering, connecting and sharing of values, ideas and other contents. It could be based online or offline. Social media based online platforms includes internet enabled communities for sharing and connecting

with others such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Pinterest, Quora, Reddit, LinkedIn, Skype, Myspace etc. The development of social media platforms took high speed with the arrival of Web 2.0 which is a bigger version of the Web 1.0. Accordingly, Rupin, (2015) opined that web 2.0 open more wave for interactivity using the internet which is the paramount activity on social media. In like manner, Lilleker and Jackson (2010)

noted that web 2.0 and boom of social network sites (SNS) consequently opened more door of communication among political participants and citizens. Similarly, Al-Debei, Al-Lozi and Papazafeiropoulou (2013) noted that due to the materialization of global community and media-sharing platforms, including the gradual growth of internet-based community networks, social media users have begun to adopt these platforms for the sake of value creation and information distribution. For instance, on Facebook, a user can recover information by browsing through the 'About', 'Status', and 'Photo' sections. Then, the user can as well interact and definitely develop friendships with other users (Luarn, Yang, and Chiu, 2014).

Today, social media technologies are actors to customer engagement with series of activity such as social interactions, empowerment the development of a new world of viral transparency (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009; Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft, and Singh, 2010). Strauss and Frost (2014) opined that engagement behavior is often said to exit when social media users begin an open or close discussion with the brands in which they are interested. Engagement is defined as a result of repetitive interactions that reinforce the emotional, psychological, or physical investment an individual has in a brand (EConsultancy, 2008). Social media engagement is a long term relationship that involves commitment to think about the future, ability to be flexible and ensure the other second party is involved. It entails making sure that the second party is happy now and will be happy in the future (Munir, 2018). The term engagement emanated from relationship marketing literature (e.g. Brodie, Ilic, Juric, & Hollebeek, 2011). For business organizations, engagement with customers is a two-way activity. It involves working together of the customers and the organization to achieve an end result (Forrester Consulting, 2008). In context of political marketing, engagement entails creating and building relationship between political brands

and the voters or electorates. Evidently, studies have referenced President Barack Obama, a former US president as one of the early adopters of social media engagement strategies. Obama was reported to have gained over 2.4miilon supporters via Facebook in comparison to his opponent, John McCain's 640 000 supporters as at November, 2008. Similarly, on the Twitter platform, Obama reported had over 11 000 followers whereas McCain had fewer than 5000 (Hwang, 2016). Further, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) identified various dimensions of Social media to include identity, conversations or interaction, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation building, and groups.

Basically, Munir (2018) Social media engagement is not constrained to interaction between a single customer/client but an open line of communication between a brand and its customers. Similarly, in the context of political brands (parties and candidates), social media engagement is a consistent close relationship between the political brands and its customers (voters or publics). Further, the concept of social media engagement can be explained in the light of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) model of co-creation

Information Sharing

Information sharing is the process of gathering and distributing informative contents to enhance the connection between users (Marsh, Richardson, & Schmidt, 2009). Brodie, Ilic, Juric, and Hollebeek (2013) stated that social media allows users to share personal information, personal and general views, and professional experience to contribute to knowledge creation in the online communities. Information sharing on social media is not just a one-way activity but a collective activity. That is, the information does not just always come from the marketer (a politician or supporter); it could come from other social media users like the citizens or voters as well. Situations where contents or information are generated and shared by users instead of the political party in question, is called user-generated content. Supportively, Evans, (2010) opined that users

provide or formulate new contents from a particular product or brand experience. Strauss and Frost (2014) explained that creating contents could be in different method. These methods could involve modifying or updating the existing content or creating new content for a brand or its organization.

Further, Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit, (2011) stated that social media users would give feedback or comment on the brand or product through various ways. This implies that social media platforms are used to share performance of brands. In other words, the performance of political brand (political parties and candidates) could be evaluated and accessed via social media sharing activities.

Brand Reputation

The term brand denotes an entity, object or item that exists and perceived to be valuable in the minds of its users. A brand could be the totality of what makes a company or an individual; it is made up of color, names, marks, and other physical and mental characterizes that could serve as an identifier or differentiator. Supportively, Neal and Strauss (2008) opined that brands have the possibility of becoming an asset that aid companies to convey values and meaning with the power to generate a sustainable competitive advantage. Similarly, the concept of brand is not limited to products and companies like Coke Cola, Pepsi, MTN, Nokia, Samsung, Apple, Mr Biggs, MC Donalds, Google, Uniport etc. It could be aligned and incorporated in the political sciences where both political parties and its candidates are also seen as brands with brand characteristics.

Brand reputation is the degree of trust and credibility of a political brand or party based on the relationship with its publics or voters. The concept of brand and brand has been used across the traditional marketing boundaries to other areas like politics and other non-commercial institutions. This extension began with the study of Nakanishi,

Cooper, and Kassarjian (1974) that made effort to widen the concepts as a model of product and brand share research to the arena of political elections. This study was the first published journal on political branding. In addition, organizations like the London Metropolitan Police (BBC, 2005), the Roman Catholic Church (Zinkin, 2004), and universities (Jevons, 2006) have all applied branding in the growth of their institutions. The concept of brand reputation stems from the theoretical frameworks of cognitive psychology learning theory. Specifically, the associative network model of consumer memory which posits that based on a consumer perspective, brands are those associations about a specific item that are held in a person's memory (Keller, 1993).

Brand Authority

Brand authority is the perceived belief about political brand's expertise in rendering public services. Weiners (2017) noted that the concept of brand authority is been talked about in the marketing circle and now universally accepted as desirable thing to achieve. The author referred to brand authority as company's perceived expertise within an industry or topic. Jayson (2014) identified certain factors to measure brand authority such as regular customer interaction, peoples' compliment or brag about a product, people s' voluntary share or post your brand name etc. The author opined that as more people mention you brand name on social media, they add more value and authority to your brand.

Further, studies have noted that brand authority can be established via engaging different building activities and crafting a better brand style. Supportively, Cook (2018) asserted that developing a consistent brand begins with creating a brand style guide. The branding style will aid graphic designers, marketers, web developers, community managers, and even product packaging team to harmonize their work. Developing a brand style and sticking with it will ensure the presentation of a unified brand vision to the target audience.

Brand Advocacy

Brand advocacy is the intentional act of spreading positive information about an *organization (political party)* by its customers *(citizens or electorates).* Michael, Ricardo, and Helen (2014) noted that brand advocacy comes via loyalty to a specific brand. Among the antecedents of brand advocacy includes word-of-mouth, an emotional connection, willingness to defend the brand and ability to overlook dissatisfaction. Lowenstein (2011) noted that brand advocates are customers that are loyal and have remained as customers for a very longer period of time. They have grown above the value skepticism stage, turned to expect and believe that the producers will provide the best experience. Brand advocates are on the outer edge, motivated by passion, creativity, and a sense of belonging (McConnell & Huba, 2007). They are the fanatics that honor and constructively critique the brand activities to make their chosen brand as better as they could prefer (Brown, 2010). The advocacy of a brand is an outcome of consumers moving from brand loyalty ladder. Mutyala (2010) identified five stages of brand ladder from which advocacy is the last and highest stage a customer could reach after a number of times. This can be depicted in figure 2.3.3 bellow:
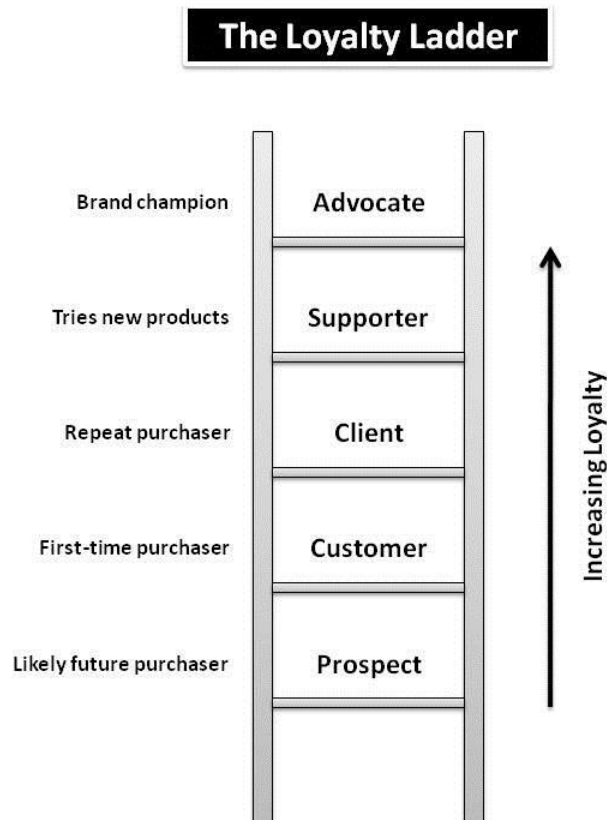
The Loyalty Ladder

Brand champion — Advocate

Tries new products — Supporter

Repeat purchaser — Client

First-time purchaser — Customer

Likely future purchaser — Prospect

Increasing Loyalty

Fig 2.3.3: Brand Loyalty Ladder
Source: Adapted from Mutyala, S. 2010. The loyalty ladder: a sideways look. Available: http://www.eightleavesmedia.com/2010/04/the-loyalty-ladder-a-sideways-look/.(Accessed: 6 March 2012).

Similarly, Lowenstein (2011) opined that brand advocates choose a particular product despite other competitors, spend their highest resources without much persuasion, and tell others about the

positive sides of the brand. The concept of brand advocacy can be demonstrated in behavior of citizens when it comes to political parties and its candidates. Brand advocates of APC or PDP will always find the good sides of the party to tell others, they will be willing to support the party without much persuasion, and they are ready to campaign and vote for the party since they are emotionally attached.

Empirical Reviews
Effing, Hillegersberg, and Huibers (2011) conducted a study on "Social Media and Political Participation: Are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube democratizing our Political Systems?." The study calculated 676 candidates social media engagement in Netherland and data analyzed using spearman rank correlation coefficient. Findings showed that social media did not significantly influence voting behaviour during the local elections (2010/2011). But, during the national elections (2010), politicians with higher social media engagement got relatively higher votes when compared with other parties. Ayankoya, Calitz, and Cullen (2015) conducted a study on "A Framework For the Use Of Social Media For Political Marketing: An Exploratory Study" with a sample of 400 respondents based in South Africa. The study adopted a quantitative method of analysis and findings show that the electorates uses the internet, mobile technologies and social media extensively and they are willing to engage and be engaged on political issues through social media. The study concluded and recommended that social media strategy should not be used alone but should be combined with other marketing programs. Powers, Moeller, and Yuan (2016) focused their studies on "Political Engagement During a Presidential Election Year: A Case Study of Media Literacy Students" with a data gathered during the 2012 U.S. presidential election with the aim of evaluating student political engagement and digital culture and analyzed suing Strauss and Corbin's (1998)

qualitative coding approach. Findings showed that 59% and 60% of spring and full students spend over 30mins and two hours respectively following up political events via the internet. Further, the study concluded by stating that the popularity of social and digital media is altering the manner in which students are engaged in politics and their communities.

Relationship between Social Media Engagement and Brand Reputation
The value created based on users' engagement behavior significantly increase the relationship between the members (Hoyer, Chandy, Dorotic, Krafft, & Singh, 2010). When the degree of engagement in the social community is higher, it leads to an increased level of users' satisfaction, trust, relationship loyalty, and cohesion towards the community (Brodie et al., 2013). In other words, using social media to create an engaging online community could provide chances for its members to be satisfied, become more loyal and boost their trust or reputation. Further, Shevlin (2007) opined that the greater the frequency of engagement activities in a repeated manner, the more a strong relationship is attached. Amorim, Rosa, and Santos (2014) also indicated that customer engagement attitudes could result into amplified satisfaction over the brand or the organization and its products. Lots of studies have identified other effects of engagement. Hollebeek (2011) identified trust as an outcome of engagement. Chan and Li (2010) found commitment or emotional attachment and connectivity as part of outcomes of engagement practice while Bowden, (2009) asserted that engagement with parties could lead to loyalty. In other words, social media engagement could lead to loyalty attitude of electorates or voters of a specified political brand. Engagement creates deeper acquaintances and long-lasting association with individuals that drive purchase decisions, interaction, and participation over moment in time (Kumar et al., 2010). Similarly, engagement between political parties and electorates could lead to lasting relation and stimulate political participation. Sharing of information or being

informative in communication could affect customers' satisfaction and purchase intention (Ducoffe, 1996). Li-Ming, Wai, Hussin, and Mat (2013) suggested that the information provided in the content of an organization's publication affect the attitude of the user towards the organization. Also, Kim, Suh, and Lee (2013) asserted that users of social media platforms do not only share their thoughts but also asks questions and demand for answers that concerns a product. This implies that the distribution of thoughts, questions and answers about political brands (political parties and candidates) will lead to recalls since it will encourage constant concerned discussions. Von-Hippel (2007) asserted that when customers are satisfied over the performance of a specific product, they tend to share it and spread the information via social media. In order words, information sharing activities on social media could as well affect political brands as voters or citizens tend to share political information to express their level satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The influence of social media information sharing was expressed in Nulty, Theocharis, Popa, Parnet, and Benoit (2016) when they opined that sharing of information via social media plays significant role in the communication strategies of political campaigns by reflecting the information about the policy

preferences and opinions of political leaders and the supporters. Thus, the following hypotheses:

H_{o1}. Information sharing does not significantly relate with brand authority of political parties in Rivers State.

H_{o2}. Information sharing does not significantly relate with brand advocacy of political parties in Rivers State.

Methodology

The research adopted a survey study of all 3,215,273 registered voters in Rivers State as the target population while a sample of 400 respondents were obtained using Taro Yamane sample size determination. 400 copies of questionnaire distributed to the respondents and questionnaire was structured in a 5-point Likert scale. The measurement instruments subjected to reliability test using Cronbach Alpha test and the results showed that each item passed the 0.7 threshold while the average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) test where conducted to ensure instrument validity. Upon retrieval and data cleaning, 17 (4.2%) of the copies were invalid while 383 (95.8%) copies were found useful for analysis and analyzed using spearman rank correlation coefficient with the aid of SPSS version 21.0 at 0.05% level of significance.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis showing the relationship between information sharing, brand authority, brand recall, and brand advocacy

			Information Sharing	Brand Authority	Brand Advocacy
Spearman's rho	Information Sharing	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.839**	.812**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	383	383	383
	Brand Authority	Correlation Coefficient	.839**	1.000	.*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.
		N	383	383	383
	Brand Advocacy	Correlation Coefficient	.812**	.**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.

| | | N | 383 | 383 | 383 |

Source: Field Survey Data, 2020

Results and Discussion

The table above reveals a Spearman's rank Correlation Coefficient of 0.839 and 0.812 for information sharing, brand authority and brand advocacy respectively with probability value of 0.000 (**Sig< 0.05**). This result indicates that information sharing has a very strong positive and significant relationship with brand authority and brand advocacy. Therefore, we reject the null hypotheses and accept the alternate hypotheses which state that information sharing has a significant relationship with brand authority and brand advocacy of political parties in Rivers State. The correlation between information sharing and measures of brand reputation (brand authority and brand advocacy) revealed that information sharing had very strong and positive relationship with the measures since the coefficients were 0. 839 and 0.812 respectively.   Hence, these imply that constantly sharing of valuable contents on social media platforms has association with the connectivity between political candidates and the electorates as it keeps electorates more informed.

Information sharing is seen to relate with the belief that a political party's candidate as an expert on political and economic matters.

In addition, our findings seem to be in agreement with other similar studies like Hussin, and Mat (2013) who found that the information provided in the content of an organization's publication affect the attitude of the user towards the organization. Also, Kim, Suh, and Lee (2013) asserted that distribution of information in different social media platform could go questions and answers which leads to interaction and affects the recall of political parties during political matters. Similarly, Nulty, Theocharis, Popa, Parnet, and Benoit (2016) asserted that sharing of information via social media plays significant role in the communication strategies of political campaigns by reflecting the information about the policy preferences and opinions of political leaders and the supporters. In order words, via constant distribution of informative contents on social media platforms, candidates directly share their political thoughts, their parties' policies which could boost the confidence of the publics.
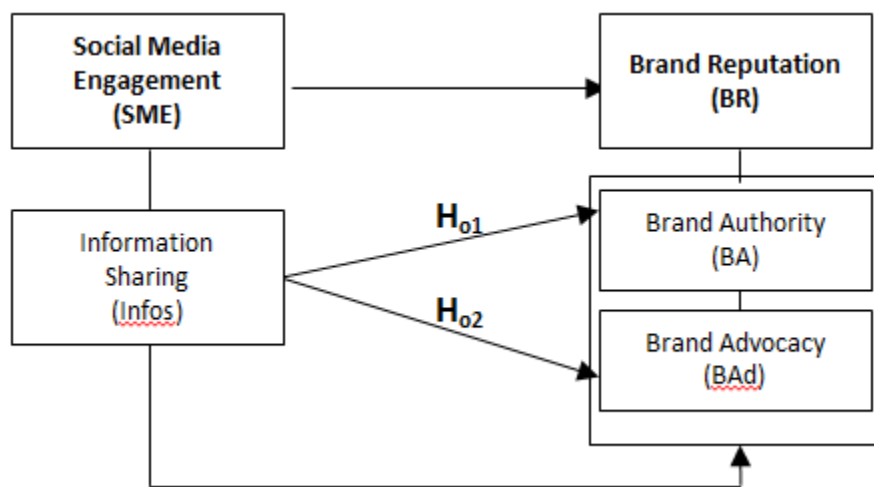
Figure 1: Operational framework of Social Media Engagement and Brand Reputation of Political parties in Rivers State.

Source: Desk Research, 2019 as adapted from Aaker (1991); Strauss and Frost (2014), Hermkens,

Conclusion

Based on the results, the study concludes that social media engagement is closely associated to brand reputation of political parties and serves as a veritable political marketing tool to gain political support from the voters in Rivers State.

Recommendations

From the results and conclusions above, the following recommendations were made:

i.   Political parties should investment more on building social media presence in all social media platforms to enhance the effectiveness of their social media activities.

ii. Efforts should be made in hiring trained social media managers who will be charged with the responsibility of drawing social media campaign plans and online brand building activities

iii. There should be adequate social media advertising budget before electoral campaigns to ensure effective adverts in order to boost party's online presence and gain more recognition.

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