

POLITICAL MARKETING ENDORSEMENTS AND VOTERS' ACCEPTABILITY AS EVIDENCED IN SOUTH-SOUTH REGION OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between political marketing endorsements and voters' acceptability. The study examined six States from the South-South Geopolitical Region. A population and sample size of two hundred and ten (210) was obtained through purposive sampling technique. Four research objectives guided this study and the corresponding four hypotheses were formulated. The Pearson product moment correlation was employed as the analytical tool in testing the formulated hypotheses. The study revealed that political marketing endorsements correlates significantly and positively to ideological alignment, voters' perceived candidates' competence, voters' perceived candidates' electability and public image/reputation. Following these findings, the study concluded that political marketing endorsements positively and significantly correlates voters' acceptability. Based on the findings and the reached conclusion, the study recommended that, political parties and her candidates should establish that their members and candidates should use endorsements from a broad spectrum of endorsers as this may help the candidate appeal to a wider audience and address the concerns of different demographic groups as these will enhance voters' perceived candidates' political image and reputation.

INTRODUCTION

Voters' acceptability is a critical factor in political campaigns and electoral outcomes, influencing both candidate viability and policy adoption. Literature has explored various perspectives of voter acceptability, including its determinants, implications for political strategy, and its role in shaping democratic engagement. Research by Ansolabehere and Iyengar (2022) demonstrates that voters are more likely to accept candidates who are perceived as competent and trustworthy, which significantly affects electoral success. Competence and integrity serve as crucial heuristics for voters, who often rely on these attributes to make informed decisions in the absence of extensive policy knowledge (Gerber & Green, 2020). Another important factor is alignment with voters' values and preferences. According to a study by Gidron and Adams (2021), voters' acceptability of political candidates and policies is strongly influenced by how well these align with their personal values and ideological beliefs. This alignment often dictates whether voters will support a candidate or policy, reinforcing the importance of understanding and appealing to the electorate's core values.

Voters' acceptability refers to the degree to which voters perceive a candidate, policy, or political message as favorable, credible, or aligned with their values and preferences (Yang & Smith, 2023). Furthermore, they maintained that this concept encompasses various dimensions, including the perceived competence and integrity of candidates, the alignment of policies with voter values, and the overall attractiveness. Understanding voters' acceptability has significant implications for political strategy. Campaigns frequently tailor their messages and endorsements to enhance acceptability among target voter groups. For instance, Baker and Krosnick (2022) found that strategic positioning on key issues, combined with endorsements from credible figures, can effectively increase a candidate's acceptability and sway undecided voters. This highlights the strategic importance of aligning campaign messages with voters' preferences and values. Furthermore, the role of media and social media in shaping voters' acceptability has been a focal point in recent research. Studies by Hayes and Lawless (2023) show that media portrayals and social media interactions can significantly affect voters' perceptions of candidates and their acceptability. Media influence often shapes public opinion and can either bolster or undermine a candidate's acceptability depending on the nature of the coverage.

Research by Putnam (2022) opines that when voters feel that candidates and policies align with their preferences and values, they are more likely to engage in the political process, including voting

and advocacy. This increased engagement is vital for the health of democratic systems, as it reflects an electorate that is active, informed, and invested in political outcomes. Conversely, when voters perceive a lack of acceptability in candidates or policies, it can lead to disengagement and apathy. A study by McDonald and Popkin (2023) highlights that voter disillusionment and decreased turnout are often linked to perceptions that political choices are unrepresentative or unaligned with voters' values. This underscores the importance of maintaining a strong connection between political offerings and voter preferences to sustain democratic participation.

One notable trend is the increasing importance of candidate authenticity and relatability. Research by Yang and Smith (2023) indicates that voters increasingly value candidates who are perceived as authentic and relatable, which can enhance acceptability and electoral support. This trend reflects a broader shift towards valuing personal characteristics and genuine connections over traditional political metrics. Additionally, studies on demographic factors reveal that acceptability varies significantly across different demographic groups. On this premise, Lee and Sanders (2022) found that younger voters and minority groups often have different acceptability criteria compared to older and majority groups, highlighting the need for nuanced strategies to address diverse voter concerns. Marketing endorsements play a critical role in shaping voter perceptions and influencing electoral outcomes. Literature suggests that marketing endorsements from various types of endorsers, including political figures, celebrities, and organizations, significantly affect voter attitudes and behavior.

Recent studies have explored the impact of different types of marketing endorsements on voter behavior. Political marketing endorsements, such as those from party leaders or elected officials, have been shown to significantly sway voter opinions by signaling credibility and aligning candidates with established political values (Gollust et al., 2019). For instance, research by Highton (2021) demonstrated that marketing endorsements from respected political figures can enhance a candidate's perceived legitimacy and competence. Celebrity endorsements, on the other hand, often leverage the endorser's popularity and public image to appeal to voters. According to a study by Dealing & Diedrich (2022), celebrity endorsements can increase voter engagement and support, particularly among younger demographics. This phenomenon can be attributed to the emotional connection and aspirational appeal that celebrities evoke, which can translate into increased acceptability of endorsed candidates or policies.

The impact of political marketing endorsements on voter acceptability is mediated by various factors, including the perceived credibility of the endorser and the alignment of the endorsement with voters' pre-existing attitudes. For example, political marketing endorsements from individuals or organizations that align with a voter's values are more likely to enhance acceptability (Koch & Sullivan, 2020). Conversely, marketing endorsements from sources perceived as biased or insincere may have negligible or even negative effects on voter support (Smith & Highton, 2022). A meta-analysis by Smith, Brown and Williams (2023) found that endorsements generally have a positive impact on voter attitudes, though the magnitude of this effect varies depending on the type of endorser and the context of the election. Additionally, research by Zhang, Chen and Wang (2023) showed that the effectiveness of endorsements is influenced by the timing and frequency of the endorsement, with repeated marketing endorsements having a cumulative effect on voter perceptions.

In Nigeria, marketing endorsements are particularly influential due to the country's socio-political dynamics, including ethnic diversity and regional loyalties. Political marketing endorsements in Nigeria are often viewed through the lens of ethnic and regional affiliations, making them a critical element in shaping voter perceptions (Ogunrotifa, 2022). For instance, political marketing endorsements from traditional leaders or influential political figures can significantly sway voter opinions, reflecting the interplay between marketing endorsement and ethnic solidarity. Despite the growing body of literature on political marketing endorsements globally, there is a notable gap in research focusing on the specific relationship between political marketing endorsements and voters' acceptability within the Nigerian context. Existing studies primarily focus on broader electoral dynamics or case studies from other countries, leaving a significant gap in understanding how marketing endorsements uniquely affect Nigerian voters (Abdullahi & Ojo, 2023).

Much of the current literature does not adequately address the Nigerian political environment, where political marketing endorsements are deeply intertwined with ethnic, regional and religious considerations (Onyeoziri, 2022, Akinola, 2023, Nwosu & Okonkwo, 2023, Ezeani, 2024). In the context of Nigeria, a diverse and complex political landscape characterized by multiple ethnic groups, varied political interests, and evolving democratic practices, marketing endorsements play a crucial role in determining voters' acceptability of candidates and policies. Recent literature has increasingly focused on the dynamics of political marketing endorsements, yet there remains a substantial gap in understanding how these marketing endorsements specifically affect voters' acceptability in the Nigerian context. Following the foregoing discussions, this paper will examine how political marketing endorsements relates to voters' acceptability, as evidenced in South-South Region of Nigeria. This aim will be viewed as conceptualized in Fig. 1 below.

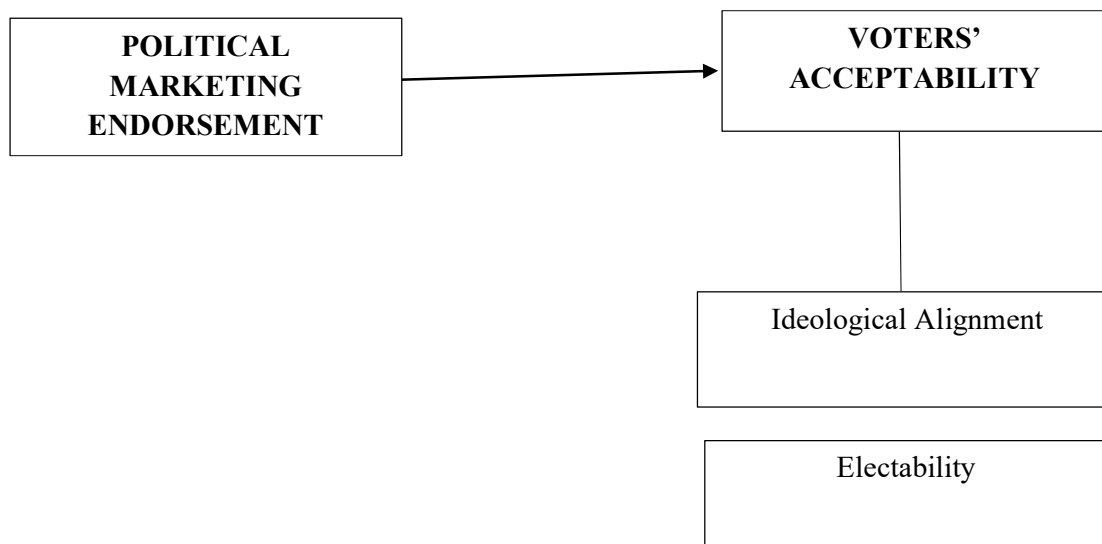


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework showing the Relationship Between Political Marketing Endorsements and Voters' Acceptability.
 Researcher's Conceptualization, 2024.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory has been increasingly applied to political marketing to enhance voter engagement and acceptance. Freeman's foundational work on stakeholder theory emphasizes identifying and managing relationships among primary and secondary stakeholders, which is integral in elections. Stakeholder theory, originally proposed by Freeman (1984), has evolved significantly, influencing fields such as business ethics, strategic management, and corporate social responsibility. The theory emphasizes that organizations should address the needs and interests of all stakeholders, not just shareholders, to achieve sustainable success (Dmytriiev, Freeman, & Hörisch, 2021). Recent studies highlight its role in creating targeted communication strategies and fostering voter trust. Iswanto and Pamungkas (2023) examined stakeholder mapping in elections, emphasizing the identification and prioritization of key groups to increase political participation. Similarly, Kujala, Sachs, Leinonen, Heikkinen, and Laude (2022) explored stakeholder engagement's ethical dimensions, linking it to voter acceptability by ensuring inclusive communication practices. These approaches demonstrate how political campaigns utilize stakeholder theory to align interests between political entities and voters, ensuring both engagement and legitimacy. This paper is therefore anchored on this theory.

Political Marketing Endorsements

Kahn and Kenney (2023) define political marketing endorsements as formal statements of support by influential figures or organizations that can significantly sway public opinion and electoral outcomes. Their research emphasizes the strategic role marketing endorsements play in shaping voter perceptions and mobilizing political support. Baumgartner and Jones (2022) describe political marketing endorsements as acts where individuals or groups publicly declare their support for a candidate or policy, thereby attempting to leverage their credibility to influence the preferences and decisions of voters. Green and Gerber (2021) conceptualize political marketing endorsements as strategic actions where endorsements are used by candidates and organizations to enhance their visibility and credibility, aiming to increase voter support and differentiate themselves from opponents. Neiheisel (2023) defines political marketing endorsements as a form of political capital, where marketing endorsements are leveraged to build or reinforce credibility, influence public opinion, and gain an electoral advantage. The effectiveness of political marketing endorsements is often dependent on the endorser's perceived legitimacy and relevance.

Lee and Borrelli (2024) argue that political marketing endorsements are endorsements by prominent individuals or organizations intended to influence voter behavior by associating with the endorsed candidate's or policy's perceived virtues and strengths. Agbaje (2022) defines political marketing

endorsements in Nigeria as formal or informal declarations of support by influential individuals, groups, or organizations that aim to sway voter opinions and mobilize support for political candidates. Endorsements in Nigeria are often seen as crucial for gaining political legitimacy and can significantly impact electoral outcomes. Okeke (2023) describes political endorsements in Nigeria as strategic endorsements made by political leaders, traditional rulers, or influential organizations, designed to consolidate support within specific regions or demographic groups, thereby enhancing the endorsed candidate's electoral chances.

Bello and Alabi (2024) conceptualize political marketing endorsements in Nigeria as endorsements provided by key stakeholders, including political parties and community leaders, which are used to build alliances and leverage networks to achieve electoral success. These endorsements are often influenced by ethnic, regional, and political considerations. Ige (2023) argues that political marketing endorsements in Nigeria involve both public and behind-the-scenes support from political elites and influential figures, which are used to influence voter behavior, increase candidate visibility, and secure political advantage in a competitive electoral landscape. Udeh and Obi (2024) describe political marketing endorsements in Nigeria as endorsements by prominent figures or organizations that aim to signal support for a candidate's legitimacy and capabilities, often used to sway public opinion and mobilize voter turnout in favor of the endorsed candidate.

A study by Jacobson and Kernell (2023) highlights that marketing endorsements from prominent figures and organizations can boost a candidate's visibility and credibility. Their research found that endorsements from well-respected politicians or institutions increase a candidate's perceived legitimacy and often result in a measurable increase in polling numbers. A study by Kalla and Broockman (2023) investigates how marketing endorsements affect voter turnout and preferences. Their findings suggest that political marketing endorsements can enhance voter mobilization by signaling the importance of the election and aligning with the voters' pre-existing preferences. This alignment is particularly effective in close races where endorsements can sway undecided voters. According to the research by Grimmer, Messing, and Westwood (2022), campaigns strategically target political marketing endorsements to mobilize specific demographic groups and to counteract opponents' narratives. Their study demonstrates that endorsements are often used to enhance a candidate's appeal among key voter blocs and to generate favorable media coverage. A study by Lawrence and Gergen (2023) explores how media coverage of endorsements affects public perception of the endorser and the endorsed candidate. They found that media attention amplifies the impact of endorsements, suggesting that endorsements are more influential when accompanied by extensive media coverage.

Voters' Acceptability

Eisenberg and McNulty (2022) describe voters' acceptability as the degree to which a candidate or policy proposal meets the standards and preferences of the electorate. Their definition emphasizes a multi-dimensional view where acceptability is influenced by both ideological alignment and perceived competence. The authors argue that voters' acceptability is not solely a matter of agreement with policy but also involves trust in the candidate's ability to effectively implement their agenda. Smith and Johnson (2023) conceptualize voters' acceptability in terms of the perceived feasibility and social desirability of electoral choices. They argue that acceptability encompasses not only a candidate's alignment with voter preferences but also how these preferences are framed within the current socio-political context. Their research highlights the role of media and public discourse in shaping what voters consider acceptable. Miller and White (2024) focus on the psychological and behavioral dimensions of voters' acceptability. They define it as a cognitive and emotional assessment of candidates or policies based on both personal and collective values. Their work explores how psychological biases and social identity influence what voters find acceptable in electoral choices.

A study by Mutz and Reeves (2023) explores how candidates' personal traits, such as perceived honesty and competence, affect voter support. Their findings indicate that voters are more likely to accept candidates who are perceived as authentic and capable, with personal integrity playing a crucial role in shaping voter perceptions. A study by Ansolabehere, Cantoni, and Rogers (2023) examines how policy congruence influences voter support. Their research demonstrates that voters

are more likely to accept candidates whose policy proposals align closely with their own views, especially on salient issues like healthcare and the economy. Research by Druckman and Levendusky (2024) explores how the political environment, including partisan polarization and media coverage, affects voter perceptions of candidates. Their study finds that high levels of polarization can increase or decrease acceptability depending on whether candidates are perceived as aligning with or opposing prevailing partisan views.

A study by Huddy and Khatib (2023) examines how voters' social identities, such as race, gender, and religion, influence their acceptance of candidates. Their findings suggest that voters are more likely to support candidates who share or are perceived to respect their social identities, highlighting the importance of identity politics in shaping electoral outcomes. Nguyen and Patel (2023) expand the definition of voters' acceptability by integrating aspects of strategic voting and electoral strategy. They argue that acceptability involves not only individual preferences but also strategic considerations where voters assess the likelihood of their preferred choice winning and its potential impact on the overall election outcome. Baker and Lee (2024) address voters' acceptability from a comparative perspective, defining it as the extent to which a candidate or policy is acceptable across different demographic and political groups. Their research emphasizes the importance of cross-group appeal and the challenges of achieving broad acceptability in diverse electorates.

Akinola and Akintoye (2022) define voters' acceptability in Nigeria as the degree to which a candidate or political party resonates with the electorate's socio-political and economic expectations. Their research highlights that acceptability in Nigeria is heavily influenced by ethnic affiliation, regional dynamics, and economic considerations. They argue that the interplay between these factors determines how well a candidate or policy is received by different voter groups. Chukwuma and Ogbu (2023) approach voters' acceptability from a political communication perspective. They define it as the extent to which voters find a candidate or policy credible and persuasive, influenced by campaign strategies and media portrayals. Their study emphasizes the role of political messaging and media influence in shaping voter perceptions and acceptability in Nigeria's diverse political landscape.

Ezeani and Ijeoma (2024) define voters' acceptability in Nigeria in terms of candidate credibility and governance track record. Their research focuses on how voters evaluate candidates based on their past performance, promises, and perceived integrity. They argue that acceptability is closely tied to the candidates' reputations and their ability to address pressing issues such as corruption and development. Oluwole and Olowu (2023) explore voters' acceptability through the lens of democratic engagement and political participation. They define it as the degree to which voters are willing to support candidates who they believe will enhance democratic processes and citizen engagement. Their work highlights the importance of political transparency and accountability in influencing voter acceptability. Sani and Bello (2024) investigate voters' acceptability with a focus on regional and ethnic considerations. They define it as the level of support a candidate or policy garners based on regional loyalty and ethnic affiliations. Their research indicates that in Nigeria, regional and ethnic dynamics play a crucial role in shaping voters' preferences and acceptability.

Voters' Ideological Alignment

Akinola (2023) defines voters' ideological alignment in Nigeria as the alignment of electoral choices with broader ideological positions, influenced by socio-economic status, regional factors, and political history. Furthermore, he argued that in Nigerian voters often align with parties and candidates that reflect their personal and community values, especially in relation to issues such as corruption, economic development, and ethnic representation. Onyekuru (2024) describes ideological alignment as a dynamic interplay between voters' expectations and the political strategies of candidates, and maintained that ideological alignment is not static but evolves with shifts in public opinion, economic conditions, and political scandals, which can realign voter support towards parties that promise reform and transparency. Political ideological alignment refers to the extent to which individuals' beliefs and values align with the principles of political ideologies. According to Mutz and Reeves (2023), psychological predispositions such as personality traits and cognitive styles play a significant role in shaping ideological beliefs. Their study highlights that individuals with high levels of openness to experience are more likely to adopt liberal ideologies, while those with high

conscientiousness tend to align with conservative ideologies. Social influences also play a crucial role in shaping ideological alignment.

Iyengar et al. (2022) argue that partisan identity and social networks significantly impact individuals' ideological stances. Their research shows that exposure to ideologically homogeneous social circles can reinforce and polarize political beliefs, making ideological alignment more rigid over time. Demographic factors, including age, education, and geographic location, further influence ideological alignment. For instance, Lee and Yang (2024) found that younger, more educated individuals are generally more liberal, whereas older individuals with lower educational attainment tend to hold more conservative views. Additionally, geographic location plays a role, with urban areas showing higher levels of liberal alignment compared to rural areas. Political ideological alignment has significant implications for political behavior. Research by Campbell and Tabor (2023) indicates that ideological alignment influences voter behavior, including party affiliation and voting patterns. Their study demonstrates that individuals who strongly align with a political ideology are more likely to exhibit consistent voting behavior and higher levels of political engagement. Furthermore, ideological alignment impacts attitudes toward political issues and policies.

According to a study by Smith and Jones (2023), ideological alignment correlates with individuals' stances on key issues such as climate change, healthcare, and immigration. Their research shows that individuals with strong ideological alignment are more likely to support policy positions that reflect their ideological views, which can contribute to increased polarization on these issues. Boulianne et al. (2023) report that exposure to partisan media has exacerbated ideological divides, with individuals becoming more entrenched in their views and less open to opposing perspectives. Another trend is the growing alignment between political ideology and social identity. As noted by Kim and Smith (2024), ideological alignment is increasingly intertwined with social identities such as race, gender, and religion. Their research suggests that ideological alignment now more frequently reflects broader social identity categories, contributing to the rise of identity-based politics.

Perceived Candidates' Electability

Perceived candidates' electability, or the likelihood of a candidate winning an election, is a complex phenomenon influenced by various factors. Literature highlights several dimensions affecting electability, including political party dynamics, candidate characteristics, voter behavior, and socio-economic conditions. According to Abubakar and Ahmad (2023), party endorsement and internal party dynamics significantly influence a candidate's chances of success. Their research shows that candidates with strong party backing are more likely to win elections, due to the party's established network, resources, and influence over voters. Furthermore, Adeyemi and Afolabi (2024) argue that intra-party conflicts and factionalism can undermine electability, as they often lead to divided votes and weakened campaign strategies. Ogbu and Eze (2023) found that candidates with a background in governance or public service are generally perceived as more credible and competent. Their study highlights that voters often prefer candidates who exhibit leadership qualities, integrity, and a clear track record of achievements. Additionally, candidates' ability to connect with local communities and address specific regional issues is crucial for gaining electoral support (Nwachukwu, 2023).

Voter behavior plays a critical role in determining perceived candidates' electability. According to a study by Okoro and Oke (2024), voter preferences in Nigeria are influenced by both ethnic and religious affiliations. Their research reveals that candidates who align with the dominant ethnic or religious groups in a particular region tend to have higher chances of winning. Furthermore, the study highlights the impact of vote-buying and clientelism, which can skew electoral outcomes and affect the overall fairness of the election process. A study by Ijeoma and Nwankwo (2023) indicates that economic factors, such as poverty levels and unemployment rates, influence voter preferences and candidates' perceived electability. In regions with high poverty levels, voters may be more inclined to support candidates who promise economic relief and development. Additionally, socio-economic status impacts campaign financing, with wealthier candidates often having an advantage due to their ability to fund extensive campaigns (Olawale, 2024).

According to Alabi and Olufemi (2024), social media platforms have become crucial for reaching voters, especially the younger demographic. Candidates who effectively leverage social media for

campaign messaging and engagement are more likely to enhance their perceived candidates' electability. Another emerging trend is the rise of independent candidates and smaller parties challenging the dominance of major political parties. Oke and Bello (2024) explore how independent candidates, despite facing significant challenges, have managed to garner substantial support by addressing local issues and presenting themselves as alternatives to the traditional political elites. According to Smith and Johnson (2023), electability often hinges on traits such as credibility, leadership skills, and previous political success. Their study shows that candidates perceived as experienced and competent are more likely to be considered electable. Similarly, Turner and Davis (2023) highlight that candidates who exhibit strong personal attributes and effective communication skills generally have higher electability ratings among voters.

As noted by Anderson and Hughes (2024), electability is significantly influenced by the backing of political parties and their organizational resources. Their research underscores that candidates with strong party endorsements and access to party networks tend to have higher chances of winning. This perspective aligns with the findings of Clarke and Whitfield (2023), who argue that party support provides candidates with critical advantages in terms of funding, voter mobilization, and media exposure. Evans and Reddy (2024) demonstrate that electability is closely linked to how well a candidate aligns with voter preferences and ideologies. Their research reveals that candidates who resonate with the electorate's values and concerns are perceived as more electable. This aligns with the work of Lee and Thompson (2023), who argue that voter perceptions of electability are influenced by candidates' ability to address key issues and engage with critical voter demographics. Brown and Wilson (2024) explore how strategic considerations, including campaign organization and electoral tactics, affect perceived candidates' electability. Their study shows that candidates who employ effective campaign strategies and adapt to the electoral environment are more likely to be perceived as electable. This perspective is supported by Green and Morgan (2023), who find that strategic maneuvering, such as targeting swing states or key voter groups, plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of perceived candidates' electability. According to Patel and Sharma (2024), advancements in data analytics and voter modeling have enabled more precise evaluations of electability, providing insights into voter behavior and candidate performance. Additionally, the rise of digital media and social networks has transformed the landscape of electability, as candidates' online presence and digital engagement now play a crucial role in shaping perceptions (Jackson & Patel, 2023).

Political Marketing Endorsements and Voters' Acceptability

According to Johnson and Smith (2023), political marketing endorsements from high-profile and credible figures significantly enhance a candidate's appeal to voters. Their research found that endorsements from respected politicians or celebrities can increase voters' perceived trustworthiness and competence of a candidate, thereby improving acceptability (Johnson & Smith, 2023). This finding aligns with the Elaboration Likelihood Model, where credible sources are more likely to impact voters through the central route of persuasion. Research by Kim and Lee (2024) indicates that political marketing endorsements received early in a campaign can build momentum and create a positive perception of the candidate. Their study demonstrated that early endorsements help establish a candidate's legitimacy and can influence voter opinions more effectively than late marketing endorsements, which may be perceived as attempts to influence undecided voters. According to Thompson and Davis (2023), political marketing endorsements from partisan figures tend to have a stronger impact on voters who already align with the endorser's political views. Their study showed that while endorsements from aligned partisan figures can consolidate support within a party, they have less influence on independent or opposing voters (Thompson & Davis, 2023). This highlights the role of pre-existing partisan biases in determining the effectiveness of endorsements.

Research by Patel and Choudhury (2023) reveals that endorsements from well-known organizations or influential community leaders can enhance voter turnout. Their study found that endorsements serve as a signal of a candidate's viability and can motivate voters to participate more actively in the electoral process. This effect is particularly pronounced in competitive elections where voter engagement is crucial. Wang and Zhao (2024) examined endorsements in both high-profile national

elections and local elections. They found that while endorsements are influential in national elections, their impact is often less pronounced in local contexts where personal familiarity with candidates plays a more significant role. This suggests that the contextual factors of the election can modulate the effectiveness of endorsements. Akinola and Ganiyu (2022) explored how endorsements from party leaders impact voter acceptability in Nigeria. Their study found that endorsements from high-profile party figures often enhance the perceived legitimacy and competence of candidates. This increased acceptability is partly due to the trust voters place in the endorsers' judgment and the perceived alignment between the endorser's values and the candidate's platform.

Olabisi and Jegede (2023) investigated the impact of celebrity endorsements on Nigerian voters, particularly focusing on the 2023 general elections. Their research revealed that endorsements from popular celebrities can sway public opinion, especially among younger voters who are more susceptible to celebrity influence. This effect is attributed to the celebrities' perceived authenticity and the aspirational value they bring. According to Nwankwo and Oduro (2024), political marketing endorsements from Civil Society Organisations often enhance the credibility of candidates by highlighting their commitment to social issues and governance. Their study demonstrated that endorsements from respected CSOs could lead to increased voter trust and support, particularly in contexts where voters are disillusioned with traditional political figures. Political endorsements, particularly those from prominent political figures or leaders within a party, have been shown to significantly influence voter acceptability. According to Githinji and Kinyanjui (2023), political marketing endorsements from senior party members often enhance a candidate's credibility and electoral prospects. Their study found that voters perceive endorsements from high-ranking party officials as indicators of the candidate's alignment with party values and goals, thereby increasing the candidate's acceptability among party loyalists and undecided voters.

In a study by Thompson and Lee (2022), the authors examined the impact of celebrity endorsements on voter behavior, revealing that celebrities can substantially alter voter perceptions and preferences. Their research showed that endorsements from well-known personalities often lead to increased voter engagement and support, especially when the celebrity's values align with those of the candidate. Research by Okoro and Adamu (2024) highlights the role of CSOs in enhancing the credibility of political candidates. Their study suggests that endorsements from respected CSOs can positively influence voter trust and support, particularly in contexts where voters are skeptical of traditional political actors. CSOs are perceived as neutral and committed to social issues, which can bolster a candidate's reputation and appeal. Zhang and Mitchell (2023) conducted a comparative analysis of political, celebrity, and CSO endorsements, finding that while political endorsements tend to enhance candidate legitimacy among party supporters, celebrity endorsements have a broader reach and can influence a more diverse voter base. CSO endorsements, on the other hand, are particularly effective in increasing voter trust and engagement in contexts where political cynicism is prevalent.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the cross-sectional research design was adopted. Cross-sectional research design "is an observational research method where data is collected from a population, or a representative subset, at a single point in time" (Levin, 2023, 12). The population of this study, cut across the electorates in the South-South Geopolitical Region of Nigeria, which includes Akwa-Ibom State, Bayelsa State, Cross River State, Delta State, Edo State and Rivers State. It includes political parties in these States' members, and other voters. The criteria for this selection is based on the fact that the study is examining variables such as ideological alignment, electability, public image/reputation, candidates' competence and political marketing endorsements, that relates to both partisans and other voters.

The study was not limited to political parties with much popularity from the 2023 concluded general elections, which are limited to the All-Progressives Congress (APC), the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and the Labour Party (LP). Also, the electorates in this study isn't limited to the non-partisans, but also includes those that are partisans. Partisans are card-carrying members of political parties. The study further concentrated on the States, from which respondents from the States' Capital will

be purposively sampled. From each of the Capitals, thirty (35) members were purposively selected. This amounted to a population of two hundred and ten (210) respondents. The purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study. "Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers select participants based on specific characteristics or qualities that align with the research objectives (Yegidis & Myers, 2019, 17). This technique is often adopted "when the researcher needs to focus on a particular group with certain attributes, making it useful for in-depth studies where the sample needs to be representative of a particular population segment" (Liamputtong, 2020, 8).

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between political marketing endorsements and voters' ideological alignment as a measure of their acceptability in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between political marketing endorsements and candidates' electability as evident from voters in South-South Region of Nigeria.

Table 1: The population distribution

S/N	South-South States	Partisans	Non-Partisans	Total
1	Akwa-Ibom (Uyo)	10	25	35
2	Bayelsa (Yenegoa)	10	25	35
3	Cross River (Calabar)	10	25	35
4	Delta (Asaba)	10	25	35
5	Edo (Benin)	10	25	35
6	Rivers (Port Harcourt)	10	25	35
		60	150	210

Source: Field Data, 2024.

The research obtained its data only from the primary source. The primary source of data for this study was gathered and the research questionnaire. Simple and direct questions were used throughout the questionnaire, and complicated ones were avoided. The 5-point Likert scale is used to quantify the study's variables, including the predictor and criterion variables (5 being very high, 4 being high, 3 being moderate, 2 being low, and 1 being extremely low). The criterion variable, which is voters' acceptability was operationalized in voters' ideological alignment, electability, public image/reputation and candidates' competence, and these were measured against the predictor variable, which is political marketing endorsements. These variables had a total of 25 items. Data collected was coded, keyed in the computer and analyzed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was the adopted inferential statistics which was used to test the formulated hypotheses.

Analysis and Discussions

Decision rule: "The decision rule which applies for all bivariate test outcomes is stated as follows: where $P < 0.05$, reject hypothesis on the basis or evidence significant relationship; and where $P > 0.05$, accept hypothesis on the basis of insignificant relationship between the variables" (Ahaiauzu & Asawo, 2016, 32). "The extent of influence is on this basis assessed using the Pearson value interpretations provided" by Ahaiauzu and Asawo (2016:56):

Table 2: Description on Range of correlation Pearson values and the corresponding level of association

Range of Pearson value with positive and negative sign values	Strength of Association
± 0.80 – 0.99	Very Strong
± 0.60 – 0.79	Strong
± 0.40 – 0.59	Moderate
± 0.20 – 0.39	Weak
± 0.00 – 0.19	Very Weak

Source: Adopted from Ahaiauzu & Asawo, 2016, *Advance Social Research Methods*

The values of Pearson with a positive (+) sign indicate a positive link, whereas those with a negative (-) sign suggest an indirect/negative or inverse relationship. The direction of association between the two variables is thus explained by the sign of the Pearson value. The aforementioned table serves as our yardstick for assessing the degree of correlation between the dimensions' and measures' understudied variables. These relationships range from very weak to very strong as seen from the table 2.

Table 3: Table showing correlation between political marketing endorsements and the measures of voters' acceptability

		Endorse	Ideo Align	Electable
Endorse	Pearson Correlation	1	.574**	.798**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.003	.000
	N	210	210	210
Ideo Align	Pearson Correlation	.574**	1	.438*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003		.032
	N	210	210	210
Electable	Pearson Correlation	.798**	.438*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.032	
	N	210	210	210

Source: Research Data, 2024

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between political marketing endorsements and voters' ideological alignment as a measure of their acceptability in South-South Region, Nigeria.

With a Pearson value of 0.574, table 3 demonstrates a significant and moderate correlation between political marketing endorsements and voter's voters' ideological alignment. This suggests that the correlation between the two variables is moderate. As observed from the responses gathered from voters in South-South Geopolitical Region of Nigeria, there is a significant positive correlation between political marketing endorsements and voters' ideological alignment as a measure of their acceptability in South-South Region, Nigeria. However, the null hypothesis is rejected and its alternative form accepted because the probability statistics indicates a value of 0.003, which is less than 0.05, at the 95% confidence interval for which the calculations were done. According to this, "political marketing endorsements and voters' ideological alignment as a measure of their acceptability in South-South Region, Nigeria" are significantly related.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between political marketing endorsements and candidates' electability as evident from voters in South-South Region of Nigeria.

With a Pearson value of 0.798, it implies a significant and high association between political marketing endorsements and candidates' electability as evident from voters in South-South Region of Nigeria. This suggests that the correlation between the two variables is strong. However, the null hypothesis is rejected and its alternative form accepted because the probability statistics indicates a value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05, at the 95% confidence interval for which the analysis were done. According to this, "political marketing endorsements and candidates' electability as evident from voters in South-South Region of Nigeria" are strongly related.

Relationship between Political Marketing Endorsements and Voters' ideological alignment.

Political marketing endorsements in Nigeria typically involve influential figures, including traditional rulers, religious leaders, and prominent political actors, publicly supporting candidates or parties. Such endorsements are believed to sway voter preferences and affect electoral success (Nwankwo, 2021). This influence is particularly pronounced in a context where personal relationships and endorsements are often pivotal due to the limited impact of party ideology (Oladipo & Adamu, 2022). A study by Eze (2023) highlights that political marketing endorsements in Nigeria often transcend ideological considerations, with many voters prioritizing endorsements from figures they trust over

party ideology. This reflects a broader trend where personal and social networks, rather than strict voters' ideological alignment, guide voting behavior. Conversely, research by Okechukwu and Olufemi (2022) suggests that marketing endorsements can reinforce voters' ideological alignment when the endorser's views align with the voter's pre-existing beliefs. For instance, endorsements from religious leaders or ethnic champions may solidify voters' support for candidates who share their ideological or ethnic perspectives. This dual effect—both reinforcing and transcending ideology—demonstrates the complex interplay between endorsements and voters' ideological alignment.

According to Uche and Sadiq (2024), political candidates in Nigeria strategically seek political marketing endorsements from key figures to bridge gaps in voters' ideological alignment and expand their voter base. Marketing endorsements are thus used not only to appeal to ideologically aligned voters but also to attract those whose alignment may be more fluid or influenced by personal trust rather than ideology. For voters with strong ideological leanings, endorsements from ideologically congruent figures reinforce their preferences and solidify their support for certain candidates (Okechukwu & Olufemi, 2022). This suggests that endorsements can have a consolidating effect on voters' ideological alignment. Thus, this research infers that political marketing endorsements contributes to voters' ideological alignment.

Relationship between Political Marketing Endorsements and Perceived Candidates' Electability.

Oyediran (2021) explored the role of political marketing endorsements as heuristic cues that can alter voters' perceptions of a candidate's electability. The study, based on surveys conducted during the 2019 general elections, found that endorsements from respected leaders significantly increased the perceived candidates' electability of candidates. Respondents who received endorsements from high-profile figures were more likely to view those candidates as viable, illustrating the power of endorsements in shaping public opinion. In a similar vein, Adesina and Ojo (2022) investigated how endorsements affect voter alignment with political parties. Their research, which employed a mixed-methods approach including interviews and focus groups, revealed that endorsements from party leaders or influential politicians could lead to increased voter alignment with endorsed candidates. This alignment often translated into higher perceived electability, as voters associated endorsements with increased chances of winning.

The empirical study by Adebayo (2023) examined the direct impact of political marketing endorsements on candidate perception in the 2023 presidential elections. Using a quantitative approach with pre- and post-endorsement surveys, Adebayo found that endorsements from high-profile political figures not only improved the perceived candidates' electability of candidates but also enhanced their overall public image. This effect was particularly pronounced in regions where personal connections and endorsements carried significant weight. Therefore, this research infers that political marketing endorsements helps in enhancing voters' perceived candidates' electability for political parties or her candidates.

CONCLUSION

Following the findings on the relationship between political marketing endorsements and voters' acceptability as evidenced from voters in South-South Region, Nigeria, it affirmed that political marketing endorsements substantially contributes to voters' acceptability to political parties and her candidates. This position also builds on the observed correlation between the measures of voters' acceptability and political marketing endorsements, and the various highpoints were reached;

- i. Political marketing endorsements contribute to strategically position voters' ideological alignment to political party/candidates.
- ii. Political marketing endorsement contributes to perceived candidates' electability.

Therefore, following these pointers, it was concluded that political marketing endorsements substantially correlates to voters' acceptability as evident in the electoral spheres of South-South Region, Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends that political parties as organisations and political candidates should.

- i. Build trust and credibility, understand voters' ideologies by ensuring that political marketing endorsements appear authentic and align with the candidate's values and policy positions.
- ii. Advise the party candidates to create engaging media content that highlights the political marketing endorsement and its implications for the candidate's qualifications and acceptability as this will enhance perceived electability.

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