

ABSTRACT

Voters are arguably the most complex of all consumers to study due to the element of secrecy that surrounds voting, their decision-making activity. A voter's choice therefore can only be known through self-disclosure. Some voters do not feel comfortable disclosing their choice. This presents a challenge for political marketing researchers and election pollsters who attempt to understand voter behaviour and precisely predict election outcomes all through polling that queries voters on their choice. In remedying this challenge with the core assumption that voters feel more comfortable disclosing the factors that influence their choice rather than their choice itself, this study advances two central arguments. This study argues that inferences of a voters' choices can be deduced from the knowledge of the factors that influence their choices with their respective and relative importance they assign to them during their evaluation of alternatives on the ballot. This study also argues that the knowledge of the respective and relative importance that voters assign to the factors that influence their choice can provide strategic insights for political marketing strategy, particularly in resource allocation. Using the multi-attribute theory as theoretical underpinning, this study adopted the pragmatic exploratory sequential mixed method to identify, segment and measure in order of importance the factors that influence voter choice. This was done theorising two levels of decision in the entire voter decision-making process, decision 'to vote or not to vote' and decision of 'who to vote for'. Face-to-face semi-structured expert interviews and structured survey questionnaires were deployed to collect data from purposively sampled voters in the Ghanaian voter population. The MAXQDA software was used to analyse the qualitative data and SPSS software was used to analyse the quantitative data. *'Voter Dissatisfaction'*, *'Voter Religion'* and *'Electoral Process Frustrations'* are identified as factors that influence decision not to vote. *'Civic Responsibility'*, *'Party Association'* and *'Incumbent vs Alternative Performance'* are identified as factors that influence decision to vote. *'Party'*, *'Candidate'* and *'Policy'* are identified as main factors that influence decision of who to vote for. The *'Policy'* influencing factor is evaluated and ranked as the most important voter choice influencing factor followed by *'Candidate'* and *'Party'*. The topmost important sub-influencing factor of the *'Party'* influencing factor is *'Campaign Message'* followed by *'Governance Track Record'*, *'Ideology and Values'* and *'Leadership'*. For the *'Candidate'* influencing factor, *'Leadership Experience'*, is the topmost important sub-influencing factor followed by *'Campaign Message'*, *'Professional Experience'* and *'Personality'*. Political endorsement from political and electoral opponents is found to have more influence on voter choice than that of close associates (family and friends) and followed by that of public figures (clergy, celebrities and traditional leaders). Based on these findings, recommendations for political marketing strategy were discussed. A post-study Voter Decision Architecture (VDA) framework was developed and proposed to be adopted as a predictive framework for voter choice. This is a novel contribution to political marketing literature.