

# Voter's choice of a presidential candidate: An empirical study

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Since the consolidation of democracy and the inception of reforms thereof in Ghana, one raging subject matter that has over time come under intense scrutiny, and persistently, altogether eminently preoccupied the attention of political scientists, pollsters, marketers and strategists in particular, has been one bordering on voter's behavior. Understanding voter's behavior is crucially indispensable to reshaping the democratic process and devising political strategies. In spite of this, there is however a paucity of research focus targeted at unraveling the distinct behavior patterns and underpinnings relative to voters' choices. Against this backdrop, the main idea of this research is to explore the antecedents of voters' choice. The theory of consumer behavior has been used as the theoretical framework. Using the survey approach, data was elicited from card bearing registered voters and analyzed with the aid of the structural equation modeling technique. Results of data ( $n = 363$ ) analysis revealed a confluence of voters' choice antecedents anchored on; quality, trust, attractiveness, expertise and image. Based on the results, study implications are discussed, and suggestions for future research are subsequently delineated.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Gaining self-determination status from British colonial on March 6, 1957, slipping into, and reemerging from the throes of a 20-year military rule, markedly marked a distinct phase of the democratization experimentation process. In view of the successful transition thereof, Ghana has been touted as not only a model, but also a bastion of democratic governance and its tenets (Gyimah-Boadi, 2008). In the wake of the institution of democracy and the ensuing fortification, appropriate measures were incepted to ensure a considerable broadening and widening of the political space to efficiently and effectively enhance citizens participation in the decision-making process via election, as guaranteed under Chapter 7 (42) of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana (Ghana Republic, 1992). The urgency and imperativeness of people's participation to strengthening democracy actually provided a sufficient basis for the framers of Ghana's constitution to among other things, guarantee under Chapter 5 (21) subsection 3, the right of the individual to form or join, and participate in the political process (Ghana Republic, 1992).

With this constitutional arrangement in place, arguably, an impetus for political activism was not only created, but also, a germane

super structure foundation was laid for the mushrooming of a multi-party political system. In effect, the conscious synergistic approach exerted toward providing the statutory subsistence for the thriving of democracy and its structures therein—nonexclusive to the creation and flourishing of political parties—was apparently primarily a mechanism instituted and implemented to among other things, provide a sustainable pathway for entrenching good governance. And because this has been the case, the expectation is that, political parties and their ancillary structures express and exude characteristics befitting of their status as torch bearers and paragons of democracy.

Acting in this regard, and in a consistent fashion with the constitution of the Republic of Ghana, stakeholders and the entire civil society, initiated steps meant to open and further extend the frontiers of the political space to enhance people's participation in the decision-making process. The successful milestone marked, etched a significant imprint on democratic practice which has become an enviable symbiotic constituent of governance in Ghana. To this end, with due deference to the 1992 constitution, the conduct of presidential elections every 4 years has become a convention. On the heels of the democratic milieu, election-related research has been inspired over the years. Part of the resolve of some of these studies have in essence

sought to crack gordian nuts—typical example of which is the interrogation of voters' behavior precisely, and the proximate factors underlying their choice of a candidate.

Within a broader precinct, a plethora of studies have unearthed a wide range of factors undergirding voters' behavior. Quite generally, as much these studies present interesting outcomes, their findings have to a certain reasonable extent succinctly underscored the pre-eminence of variants converging around the theme of ethnicity in Ghana's elections (Arthur, 2009; Fridy, 2007; Gyampo & Appah, 2018; Lindberg & Morrison, 2008). The seminal nature of these studies notwithstanding, there appears to be a dearth of further studies reappraising the much-often generalized ethnic sentiment driven argument and/or consideration of voters' voting decision and candidate preference. Voter's behavior could at best be described as a vacillating concept—one that has perennially eluded the savviness of political scientist. This could largely be due to its mercurial, fluid and complex nature. On this premise, Gyampo and Appah (2018) accentuates the dynamism ingrained in voter's behavior, and further traverse to illuminate on the possible inevitable transition in behavior from one predicated on ethnic sentiments to one likely to be rooted in an intricate web of social determinants.

On account of the labyrinthine situation surrounding voter's behavior, it becomes urgent and pertinent to conduct empirical studies. With this as a prime departure, and in agreement with the position of Whelan, Goode, Cotte, and Thomson (2016), this study takes a divergent turn—and sets consumer behavior in juxtaposition to voters' behavior—as a basis to explore antecedents of voters' choice of a presidential candidate. Taking these viewpoints into account, the study builds a theoretical framework anchored on the theory of consumer behavior. To the best of the knowledge of the authors, this is the first seminal study to draw and take into cognizance the similarity in voters and consumer behavior. The primary goal of this research is to explore the potency of the theory of consumer behavior in predicting voters voting intention and to illustrate their choice of candidate preference.

This research has a plethora of contribution to the current literature. Firstly, this study examines the influencing factors of voters' behavior, further enriches and extends the study arena into the context of consumer behavior. Secondly, by putting forward a theoretical framework, our study contributes broadly to political science literature. Furthermore, the quantitative approach of our study anchored on a structural equation modeling (SEM) technique, captured in a theoretical framework, would help deepen understanding of voters' behavior and whiles testing the nomological relationships between

proposed study constructs (Figure 1). The study findings shall provide pointers to political party stakeholders, marketers and political strategists.

The remaining parts of the study are segmented as follows: Theory and hypotheses are captured in Section 2. The method used for the study is captured in Section 3. Section 3.3 captures the data outcome. Section 4 presents a detailed discourse of the study. Section 5 captures the future implications and study limitations.

## 2 | THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

The research is situated within the theoretical precincts of the Theory of Consumer Behavior. This theory has been extensively used to investigate behavior in diverse areas of purchasing and service delivery (Masiero, Viglia, & Nieto-Garcia, 2020; Sazanova, 2020; Szmigin & Piacentini, 2018). At this point, it is instructive to state that, behavior within consumer context could either be positive or negative. Whereas the former is likely to enhance a favorable decision and/or behavior, the latter on the other hand is likely to engender the converse (Newman, 2002; Whelan et al., 2016). Principally, the application of the theory reinforces the notion of individual judgements relative to preferences and choices (Whelan et al., 2016). Consumers or prospective consumer behavior within the market space is characterized and driven by choice and/or preference.

This same logic could be generalized and replicated in the context of voter's preference for a candidate. As much as product and/or service consumers on one hand, and voters, on the other hand, could diametrically be set aside as opposing distinct entities, a careful consideration of their respective behaviors may confirm a common, if not similar or identical trait hinged on preferences. Precisely, whiles the consumer on the traditional market is related to a service and/or commodity, the voter on the virtual market of the political landscape is more or less related to a candidate, which in the case of this study is the presidential candidate of a political party.

Within Ghana's political sphere, a presidential candidate aspirant is required to meet certain constitutional requirements of the political party on whose ticket s/he seeks to contest. Common and basic among these include, but not limited to; being a member in good standing (i.e., card bearing, regularly fulfilling financial obligation and belonging to a structure at the ward or constituency level). The fulfillment of these requirements qualifies an individual to present himself onto the virtual market (i.e., election) at the party level where

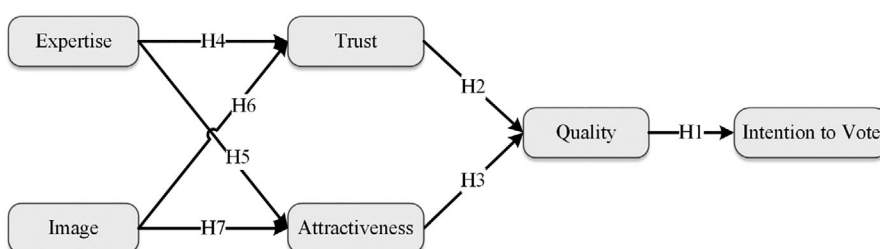


FIGURE 1 Conceptual framework

consumers/buyers (i.e., voters) would evaluate, judge and make a final choice.

After getting the approval of the party (i.e., via electoral contest or popular acclamation), the individual automatically receives the nod to contest on the party ticket in a national election where voters choose their preferred candidates from a pool of candidates. Per this scenario, it becomes crystal clear that, the mechanisms pertaining to consumer behavior, in reference to preference(s) for commodities, is akin to the one surrounding voters' preference for a political candidate. To this end, it becomes conspicuous that, voters vote on their own volition with recourse to specific preferences similar to what pertains to the context and peculiarities of consumers subscribing to a commodity or service. It is in view of these commonalities that the theory of consumer behavior is used to investigate factors underlying voters' preference for a candidate.

## 2.1 | Hypotheses development

Given the dichotomy in behavior of consumers regarding purchasing and consumption, same logic is replicated within the context of voter's candidate preference. In attaining the study objectives, a six-construct theoretical framework model is presented to examine the nomological relationships between proposed study constructs. In respect of the construct relationships, the study hypothesizes a positive relationship. A detailed discourse on the study hypotheses are presented below.

## 2.2 | Intention to vote

Consumer behavior research has over the years confirmed intention as a significant predictor or determinant of individual action (Arkorful et al., 2020; Gao, Wang, Li, & Li, 2017; Giampietri, Verneau, Del Giudice, Carfora, & Finco, 2018). Most importantly, intention as a derivative of individual's conscious evaluation and judgment, substantially informs intention. Overall, the intention to undertake an action does not occur in a vacuum. It is hinged on extraneous elements comprising personal, social, cultural and financial principles and/or values. By comparing consumer intention with voter's intention regarding candidate preference, it could be appropriate, altogether convenient to speculate and generalize that, it is possible for the same set of consideration to dovetail into the decision-making process of the latter (Whelan et al., 2016). Consumer intention on the market, and that of the voter on a virtual political market, significantly highlights the fact that, there is a task at stake. And the realization of this task for entities is likely to be distinctively preference-driven.

Fostering a comprehension of factors underlying voter's beliefs, motivations, behavior and intention, Newman (2002) proposed a model capturing the drivers of voters voting intentions and seem to conclude on the nature of voters and consumer behavior. In view of the proposition of this seminal study, we replicate the same logic in our study to examine voters' preferences in Ghana and finally

speculate that, intention to vote (which is used as a dependent variable), could determine voter's candidate preference.

## 2.3 | Perceived quality

Within consumer behavior settings, patrons and prospective patrons of a particular product expect some degree of utility or excellence in terms of product superiority or cutting-edge efficiency. This expectation feeds into the choice or preference decision-making process. Quality perceptions actually inform present and future decision and intention to patronize a product or service. At this point, it is worthy to emphasize that, these conscious and conscientious consumer evaluations and judgments are overarching in as far as product patronage is concerned. Snoj, Korda, and Mumel (2004) confirm the significance of consumer quality perceptions in a study exploring the relationship among quality, risk and value. Although the measurement of quality could arguably be said to be abstract, it could also be synonymous with utility and satisfaction. On this basis, whenever consumers derive utility, or get satisfied with a product or a service procured, they are likely to rate them as quality. Within the purview of measuring quality, voters are likely to consider and erect standard benchmarks including, but not restrained to; the ability of an individual to represent them, take decisive decisions and articulate their interests whiles advancing their development-based courses (Mo, 2015). These and other perceptions are likely to inform voter preferences. From the foregoing discourse, our study proposes that;

**H1.** Voters candidate quality perceptions has a significant positive relationship with intention to vote.

## 2.4 | Trust

An extensive literature review confirms trust as the individual's psychological evaluation of another being transparent (Fitzgerald & Wolak, 2016; Marlin-Tackie, Polunci, & Smith, 2020). Trust could be conceptualized to include honesty, transparency and trustworthiness either possessed or vested in an entity or individual (Lee & Koo, 2015). In respect of consumer behavior, trust is very cardinal. The consolidation of consumer trust undergoes series of processes spanning a space of constant interaction between consumers and products. A positive interaction or experience between these entities is likely to entrench trust and boost consumer confidence in patronizing a service or a commodity (Caldwell & Clapham, 2003). Extending this same strand of logic in the political arena, it could be generalized that, voters' positive assessment of a candidate's superior qualities such as personal or professional quality may reinforce, and further deepen trust (Schiffman, Thelen, & Sherman, 2010). On the basis that product consumers repose huge trust in satisfactory service providers, our study infers that, voters' degree of trust in a candidate (which could be based on perceptions of trust, confidence, etc.), based on prior experience with candidate, could significantly impact on voter's

quality perception, in favor of the candidate in question. Against this backdrop, our study hypothesizes that:

**H2.** Voters trust in a candidate has a significant positive relationship with voters perceived candidate quality perceptions.

## 2.5 | Attractiveness

Product appeal, or attractiveness is one of the most important factors likely to influence consumer perception of a product or service. The evaluation of a product's attractiveness or appeal does not actually conform to any set of universal standards. However, such evaluations are subject to the subjective judgments, preferences and standards of the individual. Newman (2002) contends that, attractiveness mostly aligns with the visual appeal of a product. Other consumer components based on which consumers predict quality may include product labels (Olbrich & Jansen, 2014). Political marketing research confirms candidate attractiveness as a significant determinant of voters' positive evaluation. Nisbett and Dewalt (2016) and Schnurr, Brunner-Sperdin, and Stokburger-Sauer (2017) confirm attractiveness as a significant determinant of voters' candidate viability perceptions and/or considerations. On this threshold, it could be speculated that, voters may be inclined to positively examine, and further rate a candidate on the basis of elegance, appealing posture and/or demeanor (Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2007) and other ocular attributes. Situating the foregoing discourse within the context of our study, we conclude that, the more appealing or elegant a candidate appears in the eyes of a voter population, the more likely for voters to regard the candidate as replete with the requisite merit, value and worth to occupy the position of a presidential candidate. As such, we propose that:

**H3.** Candidate attractiveness has a significant positive relationship with voters' perceived quality perception of candidate.

## 2.6 | Expertise

Consumer perception regarding the degree of deftness that a product or service represents, is touted to be a key influencer on behavior and purchasing intention. Expertise has been variously conceptualized. Nonetheless, it is synonymous with prowess and competence. Essentially, these perceptions exert some modicum of confidence and trust in consumers (Sekhon, Ennew, Kharouf, & Devlin, 2014). The confirmation of these perceptions by consumers, by way of their perpetual interaction with a service delivery system or a product, enhances the evaluation of the same. Whereas a positive experience is likely to inform a positive evaluation, the converse also holds. As such, to foster a positive evaluation and perception, it becomes incumbent on product and service delivery structures to prioritize these consumer perceptions, as part of mechanisms to entrench consumer trust (Akdeniz, Calantone, & Voorhees, 2013). Relaying this within the political context, it could be said that, voter's perception (similar to

consumers on the traditional market) of a candidate's (synonymous with a product on the market) knowledge, skills, competence has the tendency to boost trust and confidence in the latter. In view of the foregoing, we hypothesize the following:

**H4.** Candidate expertise has a significant positive relationship with voter's trust.

Furthermore, expertise as a variant with possible multi-dimensional relationship is acknowledged to have an influence on consumer perception of a product's appeal or otherwise. Within the confines of consumer behavior and product advertisement, the association of certain personalities, regarded as gems in their area(s) of practice or expertise (sports or film industry acting), is recognized as a potential source of consumer confidence and trust in products, services and brands (Lord & Putrevu, 2009). By an extension of this argument, voters' perception of a candidate's resourcefulness, as amplified in his or her expertise, offers them an advantage to evaluate their capabilities to deliver on the job when given the opportunity. Praino, Stockemer, and Ratis (2014) confirms the relevance of expertise perceptions on candidates appeal or attractiveness. In view of this, the study assumes that, voters' regard for a presidential candidate's level of management competence, could enhance the former's perception of the latter's appeal or attractiveness. Against this backdrop, we put forward the following hypothesis:

**H5.** Candidate's expertise has a significant positive relationship with voter's perceived candidate attractiveness.

## 2.7 | Perceived image

Image represents one of the pertinent variables that stimulates consumer purchasing intention. It encompasses a confluence of variants including outlook of a product, which reinforces consumers intention to patronize a particular product or brand. Product image is acknowledged to enhance consumer trust such that when reputation is well built on the market, the tendency for consumers to develop trust in the product becomes enormous (Aghekyan-Simonian, Forsythe, Kwon, & Chattaraman, 2012). Actually, an appreciable degree of consumer image perceptions regarding a product, compels consumers into regarding products as highly reliable, and hence of low risk. Product image as a significant correlate of a positive consumer perception, is essentially steeped in consumer expectation behavior. In essence, image is inextricably interlocked with trust (Beldad, De Jong, & Steehouder, 2010). In view of the significant relationship of product image with trust, our study suggests that, voters' positive image perception of a candidate is likely to provide an anvil to forge trust, as suggested by Scammell (2015). On this basis, we put forward the following hypothesis.

**H6.** Candidates image has a significant positive relationship with voter trust.

Moreover, within the broader context of consumer behavior, product image essentially impacts on consumer perception of its degree of attractiveness. In relations to the political space, same argument could be advanced to the effect that, the image of office aspirants, or candidates, has the tendency to enhance their attractiveness among voter populations whose cognitive and affective judgments on face value are mostly and largely anchored on appeal, elegance and individual charm (Olivola, Funk, & Todorov, 2014; Scammell, 2015). Drawing strength from this study, our study generalizes that, an appealing image of a candidate is likely to endear him or her to voters. On this score, our study proposes the following:

H7. Candidates image has a significant positive relationship with voter's perception of candidate's attractiveness.

### 3 | METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 | Sample and data collection

The present empirical research proposes a model to explore voters' candidate choice. In view of the research objective, our study elicited data using a questionnaire. In view of the quantitative nature of the study, the survey method, anchored on the SEM technique was used. The survey method was preferred to interview and experiment because it helps to predict behavior and association between constructs (Newsted, Huff, & Munro, 1998). With recourse to literature, construct indicators were adopted for our proposed study variables. They were further refined to suit the study context. Our study population was sampled in Ghana. Responses were drawn from among card bearing registered voters. Prior to data collection, a pilot was conducted using 50 respondents, and the outcome was satisfactory. The results of the pilot were not included in the final data. Taking into consideration feedbacks from pilot, the study instruments were refined with the help of four professors. Considering that the thrust of the study's data analysis was based on the SEM technique, the determination of the study sample was anchored on the recommendations of Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2010) and Kline (2010). Specifically, Kline (2010) avers that, while a sample size of 200 is fair, 300 is considered good for SEM statistical analysis. Complementarily, Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998) seem to contend with Kline's (2010) proposition of 200 sample size. With this as a basis, data collection (commencing from January 1 to April 30, 2020) issued 400 questionnaires. The study gathered 375 responses, representing 94% response rate. After removing questionnaires with incomplete responses, 363 useable questionnaires remained. Respondents answered 18 questions disseminated over 6 proposed study constructs. To increase responses, the research team made follow-ups calls as a reminder. And to avoid biases in responses, respondents were not offered any incentive. Given that sample data were elicited from different areas, Chi-square and *t* test were conducted to test differences between study samples (Armstrong & Overton, 1977). The

**TABLE 1** Descriptive details of the study sample ( $n = 363$ )

Measures	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	273	75
Female	90	25
Age		
18–25	29	8
26–35	79	22
36–45	150	41
46–55	97	27
55+	8	2
Education level		
Secondary	83	23
Diploma	121	33
Bachelor	69	19
>Bachelor	68	18
No formal education	22	7

results suggested no significant differences. The sociodemographic composition of our study sample is presented in Table 1.

#### 3.2 | Measures

Our study is composed of six constructs. The scales and instruments used for the study were adapted from prior literature that has established their respective reliability and validity. Study items were measured with multiple items anchored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1), to “strongly agree” (5). Cheng and Chen (2015) and Dawes (2008) have suggested that 5-point Likert scale is easy to foster understanding better than a 7-point Likert scale. Measures for “Expertise” were adapted from Ohanian (1991). Moreover, items for “Image” were also adapted from Hoegg and Lewis (2011). Similarly, items for “trust” and “attractiveness” were adapted from Ohanian (1991). Furthermore, items for “perceived quality” were also adapted from Sproles and Kendall (1986). And finally, items for “Intention” were adapted from Ohanian (1991). To enhance respondents understanding of the study, an overview of the research was provided at the start of the questionnaire. Respondents were not only assured of their anonymity, but also, were guaranteed that, the data provided will solely be used for academic purposes. All the scales and measurement items are shown in Appendix A1.

#### 3.3 | Data analysis and results

In view of the proposed theoretical framework and hypothesis, using the Analysis of Moments of Structures (AMOS) version 24, the SEM technique was run for model and data analysis. The proximate

rationale underpinning the use of SEM revolves around its: (a) potency to simultaneously evaluate a series of direct and indirect relationship within a model; (b) strength to examine relationships between latent and observed variables; (c) capacity to examine latent variables utilizing a cluster of indicators while testing their hypothesis at construct levels; (d) the effectiveness to provide precise measurements by modeling random errors in observed variables (Hair et al., 2010). Analysis of data used a two-step approach. In confirming the model measurement in the first step, validity and reliability of constructs were verified. The second step involved the structural model confirmation which involved hypothesis testing.

### 3.3.1 | Model analysis

Using the Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS) version 25, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to examine values of factor loadings greater than 0.7. The results of EFA confirmed values to be reconcilable with established thresholds which validate the proposed model. The values ranged from .772 to .966 (Table 2). Results of factor loadings were revealed to be greater than the acceptable benchmark of 0.7 based on which SEM technique could be carried out. Test of reliability revealed Cronbach alpha values and composite reliability to be greater than .7 which constitutes an acceptable benchmark for a suitable reliability of scale (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). These results are presented in Table 3. Test of convergent validity through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were found to be greater than the recommended threshold of .5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity was also established (Table 3), indicating that measures that were not supposed to be related were indeed distinct.

### 3.3.2 | Measurement and structural model evaluation

Using AMOS, our study evaluated the goodness-of-fit of the measurement and structural model, and further examined the significant level of hypothesis paths. In testing the overall fitness of the proposed study model, various indices examined included the; Comparative Fit Index, Normed Fit Index, Parsimonious Normed Fit Index, Incremental Fit Index, Chi-square/Degree of Freedom (*CMIN/Df*), Parsimonious Comparative Fit Index, Goodness-of-Fit Index, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation. These indices are used to signify diverse categories of model fit measures and their respective levels of acceptance fit (Table 4).

Values presented in Table 4 indicates that measures have good fitness consistent with the recommended benchmarks of Wu (2010). The study model finds good fitness in consonance with the acceptable thresholds put forward by Elkaseh, Wong, and Fung (2016) and Miles and Shevlin (2007). This is a sufficient basis to conclude on the appropriateness and acceptability of the structural and measurement model.

### 3.3.3 | Hypothesis testing and effects

Proposed hypotheses were subsequently tested after examining the validity of the measurement model results of path analysis (Figure 2). The results revealed a significant positive relationship between: perceived quality and intention ( $\beta = .229$ ,  $t = 3.535$ ,  $p < .001$ ), trust and perceived quality ( $\beta = .209$ ,  $t = 3.783$ ,  $p < .001$ ), attractiveness and perceived quality ( $\beta = .361$ ,  $t = 5.568$ ,  $p < .001$ ), expertise and trust

Construct	Item	INT	TRU	QUA	EXP	IMG	ATT
Intention to vote (INT)	INT1	.830					
	INT2	.910					
	INT3	.961					
Trust (TRU)	TRU1		.901				
	TRU2		.879				
	TRU3		.857				
Quality (QUA)	QUA1			.814			
	QUA2			.818			
	QUA3			.966			
Expertise (EXP)	EXP1				.887		
	EXP2				.875		
	EXP3				.827		
Image (IMG)	IMG1					.843	
	IMG2					.893	
	IMG3					.869	
Attractiveness (ATT)	ATT1						.766
	ATT2						.923
	ATT3						.772

**TABLE 2** Loadings and cross loadings

**TABLE 3** Correlation between constructs and indicators of convergent and discriminant validity

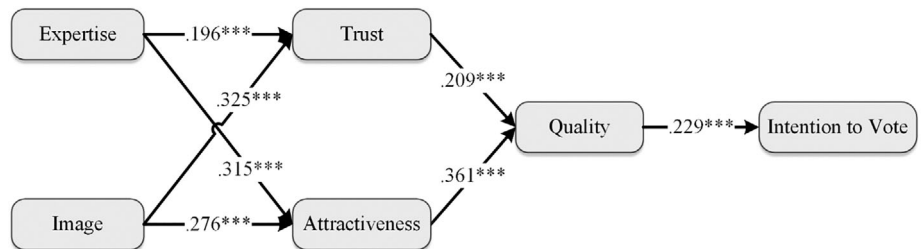
Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Attractiveness	<b>.823</b>					
2. Trust	.077	<b>.879</b>				
3. Quality	.303**	.224**	<b>.880</b>			
4. Intention to vote	.394**	.069	.185**	<b>.902</b>		
5. Image	.374**	.334**	.305**	.346**	<b>.868</b>	
6. Expertise	.383**	.277**	.378**	.194**	.432**	<b>.864</b>
Mean	3.728	3.455	3.574	3.204	3.878	3.883
SD	1.002	1.087	1.039	1.282	.892	1.047
Cronbach's alpha	.864	.912	.901	.926	.903	.900
AVE	.678	.773	.755	.814	.754	.746
Composite reliability	.863	.911	.902	.929	.902	.898

Note: Items in boldface represent the square roots of the average variance extracted scores of study constructs.

**TABLE 4** Fit indices for measurement and structural model

Measurements	Indices	Criterion	Results	
			Structural model	Measurement
Absolute fit measures	AGFI	>.80	.867	.923
	GFI	>.90	.901	.946
	RMSEA	<.08	.071	.040
Incremental fit measures	NFI	>.90	.925	.960
	CFI	>.90	.950	.985
	IFI	>.90	.950	.985
	CMIN/DF	<3.00	2.819	1.574

**FIGURE 2** Structural equation with results of path significance. \*\*\* $p < .001$



**TABLE 5** Path analysis of structural mode

Path	B	T value	Hypothesis	Interpretation
Quality → Intention to vote	.229***	3.535	H1	Supported
Trust → Quality	.209***	3.783	H2	Supported
Attractiveness → Quality	.361***	5.568	H3	Supported
Expertise → Trust	.196***	3.296	H4	Supported
Expertise → Attractiveness	.315***	5.706	H5	Supported
Image → Trust	.325***	5.325	H6	Supported
Image → Attractiveness	.276***	5.003	H7	Supported

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

( $\beta = .196$ ,  $t = 3.296$ ,  $p < .001$ ), expertise and attractiveness ( $\beta = .315$ ,  $t = 5.706$ ,  $p < .001$ ), image and attractiveness ( $\beta = .276$ ,  $t = 5.003$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and finally, image and trust ( $\beta = .325$ ,  $t = 5.325$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

These results confirm our proposed study hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. Summarily, our results of hypotheses testing indicated the support of all proposed hypotheses as presented in Table 5.

**TABLE 6** Results of specific indirect effect

Path	Estimate	Bootstrap SE	95% bootstrap CI		Is there an indirect effect?
			Lower	Upper	
EXP → TRU → QUA → INT	.004	.003	.000	.012	Yes
EXP → ATT → QUA → INT	.005	.006	-.005	.019	No
IMG → TRU → QUA → INT	.006	.005	-.001	.018	No
IMG → ATT → QUA → INT	.003	.007	-.010	.017	No

Abbreviations: ATT, attractiveness; CI, confidence interval; EXP, experience; INT, intention; QUA, quality; TRU, trust.

Moreover, the results of test of indirect effects revealed a relationship between expertise, trust, quality and intention. There was no indirect relationship between expertise, attractiveness, quality and intention.

Similarly, there was also no indirect relationship between image, trust, quality and intention. Moreover, our test further revealed no indirect relationship between image, attractiveness, quality and intention. Our results of specific indirect effect are captured in Table 6.

## 4 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The central focus of this study was to investigate voters' voting intention regarding their presidential candidate preference. With reference to prior studies, our research proposed a model with constructs rooted in the theory of consumer behavior. Data were elicited from eligible voters across regions in Ghana. In addition to validating the potency and relevance of our model, the outcome of our study underscores voting as an exercise essentially not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end. This assertion is predicated on the relevance of voting to the consolidation of democracy. On the basis of empirical results, this study does not only enlighten the various intricate and interconnected patterns of voters' behavior, but also, proffers an appreciable degree of insights for political structures, political functionaries and campaign managers who are key actors in terms of devising results-oriented political and election strategies. On the basis of the status of the aforementioned entities, it is obvious that, a comprehension of voters' behavior, complemented by a much deeper appreciation of the voting architecture would immensely inure to their benefits by way of helping them come up with mechanism and counter mechanisms targeted wooing voters while magnifying party and/or candidate electoral fortunes. The outcome of our study reveals quite enthralling, yet insightful results.

Firstly, the empirical results of our study revealed a significant positive relationship between candidate quality and voters' voting intention. This finding, which corroborated our proposed study hypothesis 1, was recorded at a significant level of  $\beta = .229$ ,  $t = 3.535$ ,  $p = .001$ . Interpreting this study outcome within our study context, and more particularly in relations to the theoretical framework could suggest that, product consumers, just like voters, have identical behavior patterns in decision-making. Specifically, just as consumers are preoccupied with accruing value for money by way of expecting

quality from products, voters are as well likely to be obsessed with deriving value for the leadership choices made through voting.

For this reason, voters would invariably be expecting candidates to display a certain degree of quality, and further exhibit traits such as; responsiveness, sense of purpose, care and concern, decisiveness and intrepidity, amongst others. In view of this, for purposes of political expediency, it would be prudent for political parties, campaign managers and their teams to assign some degree of paramountcy to earlier mentioned quality indicators whenever they are presenting candidates for elections. This study outcome is reconcilable with Lim and Snyder (2015) who confirmed the significance of candidate quality on voters voting intention. Another recent seminal study by Kirkland and Coppock (2017) also sheds significant light on the relationship between candidate's quality features and voters' favorable voting behavior.

Secondly, our study results revealed a significant positive relationship between voters' trust in candidates and quality perceptions regarding candidates ( $\beta = .209$ ,  $t = 3.783$ ,  $p = .001$ ). This outcome was consistent with our proposed study hypothesis 2. An interrogation of this finding may suggest that, voter's degree of trust in candidates, as may be evidenced in strength, integrity, ability, surety and confidence, could significantly enhance voters' quality perceptions regarding candidates. The favorable existence of these indices could invariably foster voter's acceptance and confidence base on which a strong credence in candidate could be built (Baier, 1992).

Because this is likely to be the case, voters trust in candidates is likely to receive a boost when among other things, they perceive of candidates to have the capacity to pursue their interests and advance their welfare at all levels. The imperative of voters' trust, relative to their choice of leadership is underscored by Akdeniz et al. (2013) and Stockemer and Praino (2017). On the basis of this finding, it is important that political parties, campaign managers and other election stakeholders become much concerned with candidate credibility—an integral driver of political campaign.

Therefore, it is urgent for stakeholders to investigate, conduct proper and diligent background checks before considering or presenting candidates for election. Just as consumers are likely to patronize products they find credible, voters on the other hand may be more inclined to vote for candidates they repose trust in. For this reason, political parties and stakeholders should be conscious and deliberate in presenting credible candidates because candidates regarded as unworthy of trust are likely to diminish or mar electoral fortunes.

Furthermore, consistent with our proposed study hypothesis 3, attractiveness was revealed to have a significant positive relationship with quality ( $\beta = .361, t = 3.568, p = .001$ ). Attractiveness as a significant predictor and influencer of voters' candidate preference is amplified and well established in prior study findings (Banducci, Karp, Thrasher, & Rallings, 2008; Milazzo & Mattes, 2016; Nisbett & Dewalt, 2016; Praino & Stockemer, 2019). This study outcome presupposes that, physically attractive candidates are more likely to be perceived as worthy and replete with leadership values and qualities. Barelds-Dijkstra and Dick (2008), Berggren, Jordahl, and Poutvaara (2010) and King and Leigh (2009) contend with the notion that, candidates with appealing and attractive personalities, stand a better chance to be treated more favorably by voters, ahead of other candidates perceived to be less attractive.

However, considering the subjectiveness and diversity in perception of "attractiveness," Atkinson, Enos, and Hill (2009) points out possible contextual factors (for instance, demographics) that may influence its interpretation. On this basis, Atkinson et al. (2009) proceeds to further pinpoint the inherent flawed generalization—for which reason he argues that, it may not constitute a potent basis for electoral success. In a counter argument, Praino et al. (2014) asserts that, the effect of candidate's attractiveness could be quite large in exerting a considerable weight on electoral outcome. These findings notwithstanding, seminal studies stretching across both developed and developing countries affirm the significance of attractiveness in relation to voter preferences (Lawson, Lenz, Baker, & Myers, 2010; Praino et al., 2014; Rosar, Klein, & Beckers, 2008, 2012; Stockemer & Praino, 2017).

On this score, it is practically incumbent for political parties, political strategists and other stakeholders to consider the attractiveness of other candidates or potential candidates likely to compete with their candidate. Confirming and reiterating the salience of attractiveness as a sufficient favorable predictor and/or influencer of voters' behavior, Stockemer and Praino (2017) seem to underline certain inherent variants from a gender perspective. Whereas females may look out for a clearer skin, males on the other hand are likely to consider well presentation of candidates. More so, it is important that political parties and political strategists in particular pay attention to voter idiosyncrasies likely to be precipitated by regional, cultural and social factors.

Moreover, in support of hypothesis 4, empirical results of our study revealed voters' perceptions of candidates' expertise to have a significant positive relationship with trust ( $\beta = .196, t = 3.296, p = .001$ ). This result confirms candidate's worth (i.e., mastery, knowledge, aptitude, experience) as a relevant antecedent of voter's candidate preference. An excavation of this outcome may imply that, candidates with a certain degree of technical or managerial competence, are likely to be reposed with trust more than others with a dearth of such competence. By inference, when voters are choosing candidates, they are not just choosing candidates with identity labels and policy stance, they are choosing with reference to certain personal background characteristics including, but not restrained to expertise – which is ostensibly a matter of priority. In this regard, voters may refer to candidate's career trajectory as standard

benchmark for judging or evaluating his/her expertise. More so, voters' favorable perception of candidate's competency may subsequently build their trust in candidate's capability to lobby for development projects and advance their general welfare. These in essence are attributes construed as an effective leadership quality credential (Sekhon et al., 2014). The importance of candidate expertise as an influencer of voters' intention is echoed in the prior studies of Gift and Lastra (2018), Kirkland and Coppock (2017) and Pedersen, Dahlgaard, and Citi (2019).

Results of data analysis further revealed candidate's expertise to have a significant positive relationship with voter's perception of candidate's attractiveness ( $\beta = .315, t = 5.706, p = .001$ ). In agreement with hypothesis 5, our finding is consistent with Praino et al. (2014) and Stockemer and Praino (2017). An elucidation of this outcome presupposes that, candidates' level of expertise is likely to influence their assessment by voters. On the other breadth, it could also be deduced that, voters' evaluation of a candidate's managerial proclivities and competence is likely to be evaluated as a mark of attractiveness. The takeaway at this point could be that, reasonably, while it is possible that candidates with the required expertise level are likely to be considered as more appealing and as such likely be held in a higher esteem, candidates without such attributes may fall out of voters' favor.

Our finding underscores candidate's expertise, or competence as inextricably tied to a favorable voter perception of candidates. On this score, we can presume that, voter's perception, and subsequent assessment and/or inquisition into candidates' competence, or expertise can neither be disparately considered nor entirely divorced from attractiveness. It could further be deduced that; voters' evaluation of candidate's managerial proclivities and competence is likely to be evaluated as a mark or perhaps hallmark of attractiveness.

In conformity with our proposed hypothesis 6, candidates' image was revealed to also have a significant positive relationship with voters' trust ( $\beta = .325, t = 5.325, p = .001$ ). This testifies to the study finding of Scammell (2015) who echoes the relevance image as a potential source of voter trust and confidence within an election context. Further explication of this study finding could indicate that, candidates' endearment, charm, charisma and appeal to a voter population could spur trust—which is an indispensable ingredient in both leadership and governance.

By extension, it could be hypothesized that, candidates with good and positive image are predictably likely to be trusted or deemed as trustworthy. Conversely, other candidates deemed to be deficient or considered to fall short of this attribute are likely not to be ascribed such attributes. Given the centrality of candidate image to voters' trust, it is important that political parties and strategists alike put a premium on image as a prerequisite for considering and confirming candidature for a leadership position.

Finally, results of our study verified the significant positive relationship between candidates' image and attractiveness to voters. This outcome was at a significant level of  $\beta = .276, t = 5.003, p = .001$ . Our result resonates with proposed study hypothesis 7. This finding underscores the fact that, to a certain extent, candidates'

attractiveness to voters, could be generalized to be anchored on candidate's image or reputation. This finding is confirmed in the seminal study of Scammell (2015) and Nisbett and Dewalt (2016).

Overall, our study confirms the theory of consumer behavior as overarching and appropriate to evaluating and interrogating voters' behavior. The study confirms the proposed research model. Moreover, it also significantly illuminates on the intricately interwoven patterns of voters' behavior—a phenomenon that has not been sufficiently explored—more particularly in Ghana. As Ghana finds itself in an electioneering year, and likely to go to the polls in December 2020, this study—which to the best of the knowledge of the authors is the first to be conducted in Ghana—would help guide the planning, devising and deployment of political strategies. The study findings would foster a comprehension of voters' behavior and the gamut of factors influencing candidate choice.

## 5 | IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The study has broad implications for theory and practice. Theoretically, our study has corroborated the similarity in consumer behavior (i.e., product purchasing intention and/or brand patronage) with voter's choice of a presidential candidate in a purely political setting. Our study also confirms the suitability and appropriateness of the theory of consumer behavior in studying voter's behavior. The study outcome could help provide pointers targeted at guiding the deployment of political strategies. Practically, our study has overwhelming ramifications for political structures and functionaries in and outside Ghana. Given the dearth of empirical studies on voters' preference, this study is timely as it comes handy in furnishing politicians, political strategist, policy makers and marketers with current rudimentary insights into voters' behavior, particularly at a time when Ghana will be going to the polls to elect a Chief Executive president and other Members of Parliament (MP's) in December 2020. Specifically, our study has confirmed that, voter's preference for a presidential candidate does not happen out of the blue, but rather premised on a conflux of factors solidly grounded on; quality, trust, attractiveness, image and expertise perceptions.

For purposes of political strategy design and deployment, as well as the imperativeness to guide the conduct of future research, we consider it highly commendable to outline the shortcomings of this study. First, this study is purely quantitative. Data for this study were elicited via a self-administered questionnaire. We strongly suggest future studies to either use qualitative or mixed method study to draw data. In view of the self-administered medium of data collection, we entreat future studies to use online medium to reach out to larger populations. Moreover, to facilitate the observation of voter behavior over time, our study suggests future studies to utilize longitudinal data. This will help unravel the dynamic trends in voter's behavior. Moreover, given that data was drawn from administrative regions across Ghana, we implore future research to consider sampling specific regions. Region-specific studies of this sort will help reveal the peculiarities, while shedding light on the intricacies and subtleties

underlying voter's behavior. These limitations outlined, as much as we caution against the wholesale generalization of the study findings, we emphasize that, they however do not in any way impair or weaken their validity and reliability.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

All procedures performed in this study are in consonance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was solicited from all individual participants included in the study.

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## APPENDIX A.

**TABLE A1** Constructs and measurement items

Construct	Measures	Source
Expertise	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I prefer an informed candidate</li> <li>2. I prefer a technocrat candidate</li> <li>3. I prefer an experienced candidate</li> </ol>	Ohanian (1991)
Image	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I prefer a good-looking candidate</li> <li>2. I prefer a charismatic candidate</li> <li>3. I prefer a well-prepared candidate with a reputé for the best political campaign</li> </ol>	Ohanian (1991)
Trust	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I prefer a trustworthy candidate</li> <li>2. I prefer an honest candidate</li> <li>3. I prefer a sincere candidate</li> </ol>	Ohanian (1991)
Attractiveness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I prefer physically attractive candidates</li> <li>2. I prefer elegant and sensual candidates</li> <li>3. I prefer candidates with style and prettiness</li> </ol>	Ohanian (1991)
Perceived quality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I prefer voting for the right candidate</li> <li>2. I am much concerned about the caliber of candidate I vote for</li> <li>3. I am concerned with voting for the worthy candidate</li> </ol>	Sproles and Kendall (1986)
Intention to vote	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I scoop for sufficient candidate information before voting</li> <li>2. Voting for the right candidate is paramount to me</li> <li>3. I prefer voting for a presidential candidate</li> </ol>	Ohanian (1991)