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Does Corporate Social Responsibility Enhance Political Marketing?

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ABSTRACT

This study shows how political party social responsibility influences voting intentions. The mediating effect of voter satisfaction, and political party preference was also studied. The purpose of this paper is to provide empirical evidence on the applicability of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in political marketing. The study provided a conceptualization of political party social responsibility and also evidence of political party involvement in social responsibility using online reports. A content analysis of online reports found a narrow focus on CSR pertaining mainly to initiatives such as philanthropy and cause-promotions. We developed a scenario of a hypothetical political party and surveyed 173 voters to examine how voters will respond to perceived CSR initiative by a political party/candidate. The findings indicate that political party social responsibility has a significant relationship with voter satisfaction and voter preference. Political party social responsibility was found to have an indirect relationship with voter intentions through voter satisfaction and voter preference. This study contributes to knowledge of how political marketing could be improved using social responsibility. This paper seeks to start an academic debate on how political party social responsibility could be used to create value for political parties, political candidates, and voters.

KEYWORDS


Political party; corporate social responsibility; political marketing; voter satisfaction; voting intention

Introduction

Politics and marketing play significant roles in every society, considering how they affect the lives of people (O’Cass & Voola, 2011). The role played by political parties in both developed and developing economies is significant, hence it has attracted research attention from a number of academic disciplines such as psychology (Leech & Cronk, 2017), religion (Fowler, 2018), and marketing (Dann et al., 2007). Marketing researchers are interested in politics considering the role marketing plays in promoting political parties, candidates

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and the opportunities offered to voters to be part of a constructive dialogue (O’Cass, 1996).

Political marketing involves a direct transference of marketing tools and concepts to political party activities (Lock & Harris, 1996). This is not the use of the business concepts to explain election campaigns, but to explain how political parties and candidates could use practical marketing concepts to achieve political goals (O’Shaughnessy, 2001). O’Cass and Voola (2011) also state that there is an increasing development of practical implications of political marketing at the strategic level. This implies that researchers are not only interested in the theoretical development of the political marketing concept, but also in its application at the strategic level to demonstrate the efficacy of using marketing strategies to achieve political objectives. In line with this, O’Cass (1996) proposed the need for empirical research to establish the applicability of marketing concept in politics.

The need to achieve strategic outcomes for political marketing means there must be a shift from a common practice of using advertising. Advertising seems to be the most fundamental link between marketing and politics (Kaid, 2012). Maarek (2008) asserts that political marketing has replaced political propaganda communications with commercial marketing approaches. Apart from studies on political marketing and advertising (Falkowski & Cwalina, 2012; Kaid, 2012; O’Cass, 2002; Rothschild, 1978; Veer et al., 2010), many others have looked at marketing issues such as branding (Cwalina & Falkowski, 2015; Needham & Smith, 2015; Schneider, 2004; Speed et al., 2015), relationship marketing (Bannon, 2005; Henneberg & O’Shaughnessy, 2009), and market orientation (O’Cass, 2001; O’Cass & Voola, 2011; Ormrod & Henneberg, 2010). Notwithstanding the contributions made by these scholars to support the view of Scammell (1999) that the concept of political marketing has developed beyond just explaining the promotional features of politics to involve understanding party and voter behavior yet, the marketing concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) which upholds the obligations of organizations toward society has been given little attention. This study proposes an extension of discussions of the political marketing literature to include CSR.

CSR is one of the strategic issues that has witnessed applicability in marketing. There is a proliferation of CSR in the marketing literature including its effect on nonprofit organizations’ service quality (Andreini et al., 2014), branding (Balmer & Powell, 2011; He & Li, 2011; Vallaster et al., 2012), communication (Du et al., 2010; Hinson, 2011; Lee et al., 2013), and customer loyalty (Choi & La, 2013; Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013). There is enough evidence to suggest that engaging in CSR activities has an influence on a firm’s marketing and financial performance (Arendt & Brettel, 2010; Kang et al., 2016). A significant consensus is that CSR promotes organizational competitiveness.

Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that political parties often do partake in some form of social responsibility initiatives. Considering the acknowledgment of the immense contribution of CSR in marketing, there is a possibility that the business case for CSR which is the rationale and arguments that support the need for businesses to engage in CSR (Carroll & Shabana, 2010) could also be extended to political parties. Lii et al. (2013) contend that businesses involved in social responsibility initiatives could be used to raise their image and reputation in the long-term while providing social benefits. Kotler and Lee (2005) propose a strategic approach to CSR by assessing the benefits of the initiative to the cause and the organization. A strategic view implies that organizations must adopt initiatives that make a business case that can further their marketing while also addressing their moral and ethical responsibilities to society (McWilliams et al., 2006). Husted and Allen (2007) assert that a strategic view of CSR is attained by engaging in innovative CSR initiatives that create competitive advantage and business value.

Considering the competitive political landscape across the world and the strategic importance of CSR to organizations, there is a need to examine the influence of CSR on political marketing outcomes, as empirical studies have found that CSR is an antecedent to numerous marketing outcomes such as customer satisfaction (Galbreath & Shum, 2012; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013), purchase intention (Huang et al., 2014; Lee & Shin, 2010), and customer preference (M. T. Liu et al., 2014b). Also, the strategic importance of CSR in commercial marketing has been extended to the marketing of nonprofit organizations (Waters & Ott, 2014) and could be applied in political marketing.

This current study proposes that political parties should be recognized as businesses to win customers (voters). The competitive environment that characterizes commercial marketing could be seen in the political arena. Marketing strategies and concepts are therefore applied by political parties to stay competitive and relevant. Therefore, the need for engaging in CSR to achieve political objectives is worth considering. Furthermore, political parties could in a way, fulfil their promises to enhance the wellbeing of society by engaging in CSR. The resource-based view which forms the basis of this argument explains that valuable resources may offer opportunities to achieve objectives, thus ensuring the attainment of strategic objectives. The paper will provide evidence of the effect of involvement in social responsibility initiatives by political parties on voting intentions. This is in line with a call by Dann et al. (2007) to conduct empirical research to advance theoretical and practical models for political marketing.

The focus of this study, therefore, is to find out whether CSR by political parties may serve as a valuable resource to enhance voter satisfaction, preference, and intentions. In the next section, we describe CSR in the political

arena. Then we provide some evidence of political party social responsibility initiatives in a developing and developed country context. We also provide empirical findings on the relationship between political party social responsibility perception and voter satisfaction, voter preference, and voter intentions. We conclude by providing some theoretical and marketing implications for the use of CSR by political parties.

Marketing of nonprofit organizations

Marketing of nonprofit organizations has been looked at from different perspectives including relationship marketing (Arnett et al., 2003), marketing strategy (Kotler, 1979; Mottner & Ford, 2005; Pope et al., 2009), and service learning (Mottner, 2010). The introduction of marketing strategy in the management of nonprofit organizations had long been proposed by Kotler (1979). The main argument put forward is that marketing is necessary to ensure nonprofit organizations remain successful due to new and complex marketplace problems (Kotler, 1979).

Studies on the marketing of nonprofits have since witnessed attention by researchers in an attempt to describe how nonprofit organizations can approach marketing. Pope et al. (2009) assert that there is more research to be done on how marketing practice can be replicated in nonprofit organization management. Pope et al. (2009) found that nonprofit organizations recognize the need for marketing, but were not readily able to distinguish it from public relations and fundraising. A study by Sargeant et al. (2002) proposed the “social orientation” concept from the marketing orientation concept, which focusses on how a nonprofit organization can meet the needs of stakeholders and broader society and also view nonprofit performance through marketing as the ability to ensure they survive through practices that make them effective and efficient.

The outcome of using marketing by nonprofit organizations has witnessed some scholarly attention. Arnett et al. (2003) propose how relationship marketing can promote the marketing of the nonprofit organization. Relationship marketing can be developed through participation in community activities or reciprocated by giving back to society. By creating activities that satisfy the needs of the public, a nonprofit organization can begin to develop a relationship with the public which also improves the prestige of the organization. Another study by Hume et al. (2007) found that marketing efforts are needed in nonprofit organizations to improve customer retention through the development of business value, satisfaction, service quality, and emotional attachments. Helmig et al. (2004) state that marketing enables nonprofit organizations to market products and services to the target audience. This would expound upon the basic features of marketing by nonprofit organizations which usually include hiring

of a marketing consultant and forming marketing teams as identified by Kotler (1979). Therefore, marketing in a nonprofit organization enhances the ability to increase resource availability, resource allocations, improve reputation, and attain objectives.

Waters and Ott (2014) state that little is known about the effect of corporate social responsibility on organizations from the nonprofit sector. The literature on nonprofit marketing seems to be silent on the role CSR could play in the marketing process. This is, however, not the case in commercial marketing, where scholars have increasingly been studying the effect of CSR as a sound business strategy (Gazzola et al., 2017). The limited research focuses on CSR collaboration between a companies and nonprofit organizations (Jamali & Keshishian, 2009; Labib Eid & Robert Sabella, 2014; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009). Nevertheless, Andreini et al. (2014) in a study on a nonprofit organization found that CSR proves to have a strategic relevance, specifically in improving the service quality delivery.

Responsibility of political parties

Political parties at the national level play a role in ensuring there is representative democracy (Lindberg et al., 2008). Political parties are an “aggregate of more or less like-minded individuals, who come together within an agreed organisational and ideological structure to pursue common goals” (McNair, 2017, p. 6). Norris (2005) states that political parties functions include conducting elections campaigns, mobilizing supporters, selecting candidates for elected offices, aggregating interest, structuring electoral choices, developing policies, and coordinating the formation and activities of the government. Citing Powell (2000), Lindberg et al. (2008) state that political parties compete in electoral contests, enabling voters to choose from diverse policy issues and to reward or punish governing parties for their legislative performance. The role of political parties in policy development, protecting the democratic role, and constitutional rights cannot be understated. McNair (2017) states that political parties put to test their policies during periodic elections and may gain institutional political power in government or constituent assemblies to implement their policies. In opposition, political parties play a role in obstructing existing power holders and may present alternatives to ensure they are replaced (McNair, 2017). Berger (2017) asserts that political parties are the cornerstone of democracy and they ensure the principle of self-government. Political parties play a crucial role in ensuring the functioning of democracy and selecting personnel to manage legislative and government positions (Kopecký, 2017). What we know about political parties is that they have a constitutional right in ensuring the governance of a country through the democratic process.

Role of political parties in advocacy

In changing opinions about society in specific issues, political parties, per their nature, contribute to the policy that seeks to change laws and the manner in which countries are governed. La Palombara and Weiner (2015) state that political parties, whether in totalitarian or democratic societies, organize public opinion and communicate them to the government. Studies have acknowledged that nonprofit organizations are actively involved in political advocacy (Jenkins, 2006; Nicholson-Crotty, 2007). Phillips (2006) attributes the increased liberal democracy in Australia to the advocacy role played by nonprofit organizations, which provides diverse inputs into decision making. Values of the public through political parties help those in authority to make public policy decisions (Phillips, 2006).

Limited diversity in policy positions due to the reliance on a few political parties weakens the level of democracy, as evident in countries with one-party or two dominant political parties. Other vibrant nonprofit advocacy groups often fill this vacuum. On social action, Almeida (2010) found in Latin America that political parties, especially opposition parties, have formed coalitions with social movements, usually through a protest to seek political influence. Political parties need to secure a mass base in civil society to ensure they succeed during elections (Almeida, 2010). Political parties also offer an opportunity for members of civic organizations to participate in politics and shape them for running and occupying public office. These forms of advocacy may not constitute political party social responsibility.

What the law says about political party responsibility

A conceptualization of political party social responsibility may take into consideration the requirement of the law in countries where they operate. We attempt to provide background information about the constitutional responsibilities of political parties in several countries-in order to distinguish it from their social responsibilities (see Table 1).

Per the various constitutional and electoral provisions spelling out the definition of political parties, we propose that the core mandate or responsibility of political parties is related to playing a crucial role in elections and governance, and ensuring that democracy is maintained. The various constitutional and electoral provisions do not clearly state that political parties must undertake social responsibility initiatives to communities. Political parties in this study are not considered as governments. We assume that thinking of political parties as governments will defeat the argument of involvement in social responsibility, as governments are mandated to perform developmental activities. The difference between a political party and a government is

Table 1. Political party social responsibility as defined by law.

Country	Political Party Definition by Law
India	Representation of the People Act, 1951 – Political Party means an association or body of individual citizens of India registered with the electoral commission as a political party under section 29A. http://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/04_representation%20of%20the%20people%20act,%201951.pdf
United States	Section 100.15 – Political party means an association, committee, or organization which nominates or selects a candidate for election to any Federal office, whose name appears on an election ballot as the candidate of the association, committee, or organization. https://www.fec.gov/regulations/100-15/2019-annual-100#100-15
United Kingdom	Political Parties, Elections, and Referendum Act, 2000 – registration of political parties in order to field candidates at elections. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/12/pdfs/ukpga_20090012_en.pdf
Germany	Political Parties Act, Article 2- Parties are associations of citizens who set out to influence the formation of political opinions at federal or land level and to participate in representation of the people in the Federal Parliament or regional parliament. https://germanlawarchive.iuscomp.org/?p=235
Australia	Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918 – political party means an organization the object or activity, or one of the objects or activities, of which is the promotion of the election to the Senate or the House of Representatives of a candidate or candidate endorsed by it. https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00259
Canada	Canada Election Act 2000 – A registered political party is when an eligible party has at least one candidate whose nomination has been confirmed for an election. https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-2.01/page-59.html#docCont
Ghana	The Political Parties Law Act (574) – A political party may, subject to the constitution and this Act, participate in shaping the political will of the people, disseminate information on political issues, social and economic programmes of a national character, and sponsor candidate for public elections other than election to District Assemblies or lower local government units. http://laws.ghanalegal.com/acts/id/194/section/1/Founding_Of_Political_Parties

significant in the discussion of the social responsibility of political parties. Whereas governments are seen as being responsible for society's needs, this study recognizes political parties as brands that adopt strategies to achieve political goals such as winning elections.

It will not be appropriate to assume the social responsibility initiatives by political parties and their candidates to meet the needs and interest of community members and marginalized groups are part of their core mandate as stipulated in the laws of their respective countries. As political party organizations are distinctly different entities from government, their acts to help society should not be regarded as government assistance. It is also easier to differentiate political party or a candidate's social initiative from that of government, as government developmental projects and assistance are communicated as such. Hence, initiatives that are implemented by political parties and candidates to promote societal wellbeing born out of voluntary/discretionary responsibility, however, may be deemed as the social responsibility of political parties.

Political party social responsibility formed through social contract

The responsibilities of political parties can be explained from the self-regulation perspective. The argument put forward in this paper is that legal frameworks cannot regulate all aspects of the interaction between political

parties and stakeholders, hence the need to explain political party CSR from a social contract perspective. Sacconi (2007) explains that CSR obligations are either derived from legal enforcement or self-regulation. There are instances where welfare state regulations, labor-market laws, and environmental regulations, which provide a legal framework, cannot be used to regulate all actions of organizations toward their stakeholders; these firms, therefore, resort to self-regulation (Sacconi, 2007).

CSR is seen as an extension of corporate governance, where organizational decision-makers have a fiduciary relationship with different stakeholders (Sacconi, 2006). Legal frameworks work as contracts between organizations and stakeholders, but are usually incomplete, hence the use of a social contract to fill the gaps in these contracts (Sacconi, 2007). There is undoubtedly evidence of scholars arguing that CSR emanates from a social contract with society, made of external stakeholders (see Gray et al., 1988; Ofori & Hinson, 2007; Sacconi, 2007, 2006, 2004).

Social contract emanates from the belief that imperfect decisions and actions of firms create negative externalities and hence, those affected must be compensated (Sacconi, 2006). Self-regulation is seen as a strategy executed by organizations in a consistent manner to ensure they do not abuse the trust stakeholders have in them (Sacconi, 2007). Social contracts could be formed for owners and non-owners of organizations (Sacconi, 2004). In the case of firm owners, Sacconi (2004) described it as a first social contract which ensures owners are rewarded for their contribution to the organization. The social contract with non-owners of organizations demands that organizations abstain from activities that may cause a negative external effect on stakeholders, or provide compensation in terms of monetary or in-kind services (Sacconi, 2004).

The case of the social contract between political parties and society can be explained as organizations' responsibility to treat all stakeholders fairly. Sacconi (2004) states that this treatment of stakeholders is usually abstract and general in form and cannot be described or predicted. This paper proposes that social responsibilities by political parties fit perfectly into this form of social contract and therefore offers an opportunity for political parties to take up diverse responsibilities toward the wellbeing of society.

Distinguishing political CSR and vote buying

One challenge CSR has been confronted with is whether there is a purely philanthropic motive for engaging in it, or is there a hidden intention (Rajak, 2006). CSR as a gift has both altruistic and dubious sides; one that promotes trust, affection, and personal commitment, and one that promotes patronage, control, and paternalism (Rajak, 2006). To avoid this issue, political party social responsibility must be dissociated from clientelism. Clientelism is "the proffering of material goods in return for electoral support, where the criterion

of distribution that the patron uses is simple: did you (will you) support me” (Stokes, 2011, p. 1). This phenomenon creates two primary outcomes – patronage (using public resources by officeholder to gain political support) and vote-buying (the exchange of goods for vote) (Stokes, 2011). A way to distinguish clientelist exchanges from other forms of social responsibility is that it creates a fear that the flow of benefits will be cut when one does not support a political actor or action while other exchanges may promote a norm of reciprocity and do not effectively put the recipient under the command of the giver (Stokes, 2011). Brusco et al. (2004) assert that there seems to be a norm of political reciprocity despite little evidence of this universally.

From the discussions, we would say that giving of goods and providing assistance during political campaigns may pose a challenge to the concept of social responsibility of political parties. Gift giving and offering assistance to members of a community during a political campaign is used to gain political support and resembles more of clientelism rather than social responsibility. We assume that it is general knowledge that political parties help people in order to gain their votes, especially in developing countries where there is a high level of dependency on the few privileged. These highly dependent and clientelist relationships make introducing the political party social responsibility concept a daunting task.

To support the argument above, we provide some cases of clientelism in literature. Nichter (2008) cites a case in East St. Louis, Missouri in the US, where a court convicted political party operatives for offering cigarettes, beer, medicine, and money to influence voter turnout. Hansen (2010) provides evidence of distributing material benefits (political merchandise, money) to potential voters during campaigns. Harding (2015) describes a situation in Ghana where political parties have used vote-buying as a means of winning elections, rather than promoting a developmental agenda which will serve as the basis for voting for a party. Albertus (2013) also provides instances where land distribution in Venezuela was used to gain political advantage in core constituencies. Kramon (2016), using evidence from Kenya, explains that electoral handouts are useful because they make the promises of candidates more credible to voters. There are other cases of vote-buying reported in the literature in countries such as Argentina (Brusco et al., 2004) and Thailand (Callahan, 2005). On the other hand, we believe that there are certain social responsibility actions that seek to promote the general wellbeing of society by political actors, beyond their motive of gaining votes.

Considering the complexity of identifying political party social responsibilities from vote-buying, this study draws from literature some forms of distribution of goods and services to the public. The main classifications of exchange of goods and services are placed into programmatic and non-programmatic distribution. A study that deals extensively with this classification is by Stokes et al. (2012). For programmatic distribution, the model must

be public, usually preceded by a public debate about the distribution policies and implementation. These take the form of government programmes that benefit the entire public, but may be affected by political biases (Stokes et al., 2012). This may be classified under the government process of exchanges, which are public, programmatic, and predictable. Take for instance, national programmes to distribute food and other essential services for households may not be classified as social responsibility of a political party. This study classifies these actions as part of the typical government process.

Non-programmatic distribution can be classified into unconditional partisan bias and clientelism. Stokes et al. (2012) assert that an unconditional partisan bias form of distribution generates goodwill among recipients who may then decide to support the benefactor or the party, but they will also not be punished if they defect or do not vote for the party. This form may be closer to the ideal case of political party social responsibility since the exchange is not tied to coercing voters for their votes, but tends to generate positive reputation and goodwill for the candidate or party. This exchange is very different from clientelism, which is characterized by vote and turnout buying. Stokes et al. (2012), however, provide instances where vote and turnout buying are regarded as illegal in some developed democracies. The situation in developing countries with young democracies may be different as political actors take advantage of the vulnerability of people to gain undue political advantage.

This study refers to social responsibility exchanges as those that are not supported with government resources and are voluntary actions taken by political parties and candidates to fulfil their responsibility of promoting societal wellbeing. These interventions must also not be tied to soliciting for votes and must be devoid of punishing beneficiaries. We provide some initial assumptions of some exchanges that could not be classified as political party social responsibility: 1) Interventions to support political party groups or individuals; 2) Exchanges of monetary or in-kind services that are tied to soliciting for votes; 3) Exchanges that occur during political campaigns such as rallies, house visitations, and town hall meetings; 4) Financial incentives for individuals who work full-time or as volunteers for political parties to fulfil their electoral objectives; and 5) Government or state-sponsored programmes that are public and suppose not to be discriminatory.

CSR theory

Conceptually, CSR theories are aimed at providing managers with a comprehensive definition of CSR ideas to be implemented (Carroll, 1991). Other scholars have provided ways of understanding CSR by putting to use Carroll's four-dimension model, which includes economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary responsibilities (see Schwartz & Carroll, 2003). Jamali and Mirshak (2007) assert that apart from Carroll's four dimensions, Corporate

Social Performance (CSP) perspective lays emphases on the performance implications of instituting social responsibility principles guiding the behavior of an organization.

The economic responsibility of organizations is conceptualized as the primary responsibility of businesses to provide goods and services to make profit (Carroll, 1991). In political party activities, their economic responsibility may be conceptualized as achieving political objectives such as winning elections and using their political party to elect people to occupy positions and introduce policies. The economic responsibility in a typical business setting could be termed as “electoral responsibility” of political parties. Drawing on Carroll’s economic responsibility definition, electoral responsibility emphasizes the importance to strengthen the competitive position, operate efficiently, and perform in a manner consistent with maximizing electoral fortunes.

The legal responsibility of businesses are related to doing business in conformity with the expectation of government and the law and complying with federal, state, and local regulations (Carroll, 1991). For political parties, legal responsibilities are fulfilled when the electoral laws of the country are obeyed. Political parties must ensure they adhere to the laws governing their activities, both about elections or any other law. For instance, political parties are to abide by laws on funding and management of party funds. There is a lot to be discussed in this area regarding the practices that political parties undertake to achieve political power which are not in line with the law. The pursuit of political objectives (economic responsibilities) must be done within the framework of the law.

Ethical responsibilities are concerned with activities and practices that society expects or prohibits, which are not provided by the law (Carroll, 1991). From Carroll’s legal responsibility concept, some issues that may relate to political party ethical responsibility are the need to perform political activities in a manner that meets the expectations of society, integrating ethical standards into political strategy, not compromising ethical norms to achieve political objectives, recognizing and respecting new/evolving ethical norms.

The philanthropic responsibility of organizations is also referred to as discretionary or voluntary responsibilities. Carroll (1991) explains that this helps businesses to partake in charitable activities to meet the expectations of society. However, Schwartz and Carroll (2003), in their three-domain model explain that this responsibility may not stand alone as a dimension of CSR because its implementation is found in economic and ethical responsibilities of the business. In political party management, philanthropic responsibilities may take the forms of political party executives, candidates, and operatives assisting their local communities through volunteerism, charity, and any other ways that enhance the quality of life of the people.

Garriga and Melé (2004) assert that four main theoretical domains of CSR focus on economics (wealth creation), politics (social relationship), social

integration (dependence on society), and ethics (social responsibility as an obligation). This current study is underpinned by instrumental theories that see CSR as a strategic tool to attain economic objectives. One of these theories is the resource-based view. Attainment of competitive advantage has been widely explained using the resource-based view (see McWilliams & Siegel, 2011; Porter & Kramer, 2006). Garriga and Melé (2004) assert that scholars propose that the use of CSR is a means to gain competitive advantage by integrating it with their business to create a higher social value.

This study proposes that CSR can have marketing benefits to political parties and can ideally be situated in this theoretical perspective. Using the resource-based view, McWilliams and Siegel (2011) assert that CSR attributes and actions can serve as resources that can lead to a strategic competitive advantage. The RBT presents an accumulation of valuable, inimitable, rare, not- substitutable (VRIN) resources which serve as a source of competitive advantage (Barney, 1986). According to McWilliams and Siegel (2011), CSR may provide social value and also some value for an organization. Flammer (2015), using the RBT perspective, found that CSR is a valuable resource that increases shareholder value. CSR may be included in the microeconomics concept of production and cost, in the sense that CSR related resources such as land, equipment, labor, materials, and purchased services may produce output (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). The theory is used to explain that firms must devote resources in order to satisfy CSR objectives (see McWilliams & Siegel, 2001).

In order to attain a sustainable competitive advantage through social responsibility, political parties must devote resources. The strategic advantages that firms derive from committing resources through social responsibility may also be extended to political parties, in the sense that the value created for society may translate to improved reputation and voter choice. The assumption, therefore, is that a political party may leverage on individuals within their constituency to engage in special CSR initiatives that serve as a resource that cannot easily be available to other competitors. The involvement of political parties in CSR has the potential of increasing their social performance, leading to improvement in their electoral fortunes. In this study, the resource-based theory explains that the use of CSR by political parties will provide them with some competitive advantage.

Hypothesis development

The conceptualization of the possible political party social responsibility relies on CSR initiatives proposed by Kotler and Lee (2005). This conceptualization seeks to develop the possibilities of replicating corporate social responsibility initiatives in political party social responsibility. In the view of Inoue and Kent (2014), some of these initiatives are more effortful and effective than others.

Kotler and Lee (2005) advocate for the use of a variety of these CSR initiatives in order to gain some strategic advantage. McWilliams and Siegel (2011) conceptualize strategic CSR as involvement in any social initiative that presents a strategic competitive advantage. This notion has led to advocacy of organizations' taking advantage of possible CSR initiatives as this presents unique competitive advantages. It is worth noting that these initiatives do not have features of government-sponsored programmes using state resources and clientelism (vote and turnout buying) as described by Brusco et al. (2004), and Stokes et al. (2012).

Corporate philanthropy involves gifts or monetary contributions to a charitable cause (Wang & Qian, 2011) and may improve the visibility of an organization (Brammer & Millington, 2006). Also, cause promotions may take a form of political parties pursuing activities that seek to support a social cause through paid sponsorship promotional efforts. Menon and Kahn (2003) assert that cause-promotions are initiated by politicians (see Moseley et al., 2008) and enhance the image of the sponsor. Cause-related marketing is also an opportunity for branding as it serves as a promotional tool to enhance the image of an organization by associating itself with a social cause (Bigné et al., 2012). From a nonprofit perspective, branding could be an effective way to develop an organization (Mort et al., 2007). In the view of Dann et al. (2007), social marketing and political marketing are concepts that have benefited from commercial marketing. Political marketing outcomes such as voter preferences and voting choice could be achieved when a political party engages in a sustained social marketing campaign. It is also a common phenomenon in countries to see members of political parties participating in several community projects. Volunteerism may create a closer relationship between political actors and community members. Adapting an explanation of socially responsible business practice from Hammann et al. (2009), socially responsible practices of political parties may include the provision of accurate information, fair political activities, and employee (party officers and operatives) welfare.

In political marketing literature, voter satisfaction has gained attention because scholars liken the voter to a customer (Brennan & Henneberg, 2008; O'Cass, 1996). Voter satisfaction is concerned with the overall evaluation of a set of experiences in the political context (O'Cass, 2003). In politics, O'Cass (2003) asserts that "voter satisfaction may arise from a voter's comparison of the perceived political performance with expectations for this performance, and satisfaction is indicated if performance exceeds expectations".

The central thesis in this relationship is derived from the scholarship on the link between CSR and customer satisfaction in commercial marketing. These studies have found that there is a positive relationship between CSR and customer satisfaction (see Galbreath & Shum, 2012; Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006). A review of literature by Luo and Bhattacharya (2006) revealed that

a good record of being involved in CSR creates a favorable evaluation and attitude toward an organization and also aids organizations to understand customers better. Galbreath and Shum (2012) found that engagement in CSR appears to increase customer satisfaction. In a political marketing context, voter satisfaction may be derived when candidates make promises and deliver to the expectations of voters (Kotler, 1999, as cited in O’Cass, 2003).

Theories of consumer satisfaction behavior have been used to study voter behavior (see Schofield & Reeves, 2015). An attempt has been made by researchers to identify factors affecting voter satisfaction (O’Cass, 2002). The need to ensure voter satisfaction by political parties is well expressed by O’Cass (1996) who stated that “If a political party’s product is developed about (or in consideration of) voters’ values and needs and the party delivers the proposed product, voter satisfaction should be increased”. These proposed political party products to satisfy the needs and wants of voters may be delivered through social responsibility initiatives. O’Cass (2003) explains that a positive effect of the political process is an emotional factor that may lead to the satisfaction of a voter. CSR may be placed in this political process, which may be created from social contract, leading to voter satisfaction.

An attempt to establish the relationship between voter satisfaction and voting intentions may be derived from research consensus indicating there is a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and purchase intentions. In political marketing, Schofield and Reeves (2015) found that satisfaction with political party performance examines voters’ loyalty (intention to continue voting for them). In this study, CSR is seen as political party performance. These arguments lead to the hypotheses that:

H1a: *Political Party Social Responsibility will affect voter satisfaction.*

H1b: *Voter satisfaction will have a significant relationship with voting intentions*

The effect of CSR on customer preference has usually been attributed to the benefit of branding derived from CSR activities (M. Liu et al., 2014a). M.T Liu et al. (2014b) assert that CSR efforts directed toward customers lift their preferences and expectations, which in turn, affects customer loyalty. The disposition of the customer to favor a brand makes them likely to purchase a brand (M. T. Liu et al., 2014b). In the political arena, marketing activities have been found to influence voter preference, including advertising (Hill, 1989) and branding (Ahmed et al., 2017; Banerjee & Ray Chaudhuri, 2016; Smith & French, 2009).

The nexus between political party social responsibility and voter preference is developed out of literature proposing a relationship between CSR and customer preference of a brand. M. Liu et al. (2014a) found that CSR toward

society, the environment, and stakeholders have a significant relationship with brand preference. This emphasizes that CSR societal performance, environmental performance, and customer performance increases the preference of a brand relative to its competitors. Also, Ahmed et al. (2017) found that political party image affects voters' attitudes and preference. This, therefore, makes a case that CSR is an image-building tool and may be of importance in brand building efforts leading to the attainment of favorable brand preference. Other studies have found that there is a significant relationship between brand preference and customer intentions to purchase (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; O'Cass & Lim, 2002). This relationship may be extended to political marketing as preference for a political party may lead to voting intentions. This study proposes that political party candidate social responsibility initiatives may serve as a brand-building mechanism to promote them, leading to voters' decision to vote for the candidate. These discussions lead to two hypotheses:

H2a: Political Party social responsibility is related to voter political party preference

H2b: Voter political party preference is positively related with voting intention

In commercial marketing, Mandhachitara and Poolthong (2011) found that CSR is a determinant of attitudinal and behavioral loyalty of customers. Also, Alniacik et al. (2011) found that positive CSR information about organizations leads to purchase intentions. From a political marketing perspective, this study proposes that a political party or candidate that engages in social responsibility will have an opportunity to increase chances that voters will develop an intention to vote for them. A hypothesis is therefore proposed that:

H3: Political Party Social responsibility will have a significant effect on voters' intentions to vote for the political candidate.

Research methodology

In this paper, we empirically show how political party social responsibility influences voter satisfaction, preference, and voting intentions. Study 1 is designed to provide the widest possible lens on social responsibility practices of political parties in a developed and developing context. In Study 2, the possible social responsibility practices of political parties are used to develop a scenario for an experimental design.

Study 1

Study 1 attempts to provide empirical evidence of social responsibility practices of political parties conducted through a qualitative online content analysis, to identify reportage on social responsibility initiatives. In the view of Stemler (2001), what makes the use of content analysis rich and meaningful is the coding and categorization of data. In recent times, online sources have become one of the critical channels of communication, and they are one place where various stakeholders of organizations access information (Long et al., 2015). Academics and experts in CSR were used to identify CSR initiatives from these online stories. This ensures content validity (see, Zaichkowsky, 1985) since they are expert judges, given their apparent familiarity with the topic and can therefore, astutely assess issues relating to the subject (Foroudi et al., 2014). Through this activity, 27 stories of political parties and candidates involved in social responsibility were retained.

The online stories that have reported these social responsibility initiatives in UK and Ghana provide evidence that political parties are more interested in philanthropic gestures and cause promotions than other forms of CSR initiatives (see Tables 2 and 3). From the data, 61% of online reports of

Table 2. Online reports of social responsibility activities of political parties and candidates in Ghana.

CSR Initiative	Title and Online Source
Philanthropy	"NPP Donates Baba Jamal Computer To Orphanage. https://www.modernghana.com/blogs/6112567/npp-donates-baba-jamal-computer-to-orphanage.html "
	"NPP supporters in Subin donate to the orphanage. https://www.modernghana.com/sports/366469/1/npp-supporters-in-subin-donate-to-orphanage.html "
	"PPP donates towards water project at Japkahi Community. http://www.ghananewsagency.org/print/52811 "
	"Progressive People's Party donate to flood victims. http://ghananewsagency.org/social/progressive-people-s-party-donate-to-flood-victims-90359 "
	"Bawumia Supports Madina Zongo Mosque Building. http://theheraldghana.com/bawumia-supports-madina-zongo-mosque-building/ "
	"Oppong Nkrumah Partners Coliso Ghana To Provide Water And KVIP To Akyem Abenase. http://peacefmonline.com/pages/local/social/201607/286513.php "
	"Dr. Ndoum donates \$32,000 to Ghana's Rio team. https://www.myjoyonline.com/sports/2016/july-27th/ppp-presidential-candidate-dr-ndoum-donates-32000-to-goc-ahead-of-rio-2016.php "
	"NPP supports Bilpela flood victims. http://citifmonline.com/2015/10/02/npp-supports-bilpela-flood-victims/ "
	Cause Promotion
"Zanetor Rawlings health screening laudable – Residents. https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/health/Zanetor-Rawlings-health-screening-laudable-Residents-390094 "	
"PPP advocates the setting up of a special Education Police. https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/politics/PPP-advocates-the-setting-up-of-a-special-Education-Police-316303 ".	
"Ursula Owusu And Oko Vanderpuye Team Up To Educate Community. http://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/local/social/201411/222142.php ".	
Cause-Related Marketing	-
Community Volunteering	"Policy: Yes NDC volunteers are helping us maintain security in Sunyani. http://www.peacefmonline.com/pages/local/news/201107/54878.php "
Social Marketing	-

Table 3. Online report of social responsibility activities of political parties and candidates in the UK.

CSR Initiative	Title and Online Source
Philanthropy	<p>"Labour politicians donate MSP salaries to charity. https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/labour-politicians-donate-msp-salaries-to-charity.html".</p> <p>"Just 25 MPs have donated their £7,000 pay rise to charity – despite pledges by 69 when they were awarded the increase. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3297997/Just-25-MPs-donated-7-000-pay-rise-charity-despite-pledges-69-awarded-increase.html"</p> <p>"Sion Simon's kidney donation to Labour MP Khalid Mahmood. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-41580360".</p> <p>"MPs visit county charity helping ex-offenders. http://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/15218366.MPs_visit_county_charity_helping_ex-offenders/".</p>
Cause Promotion	<p>"John Mann MP supports World Cancer Day 2017. http://www.mann4bassetlaw.com/john-mann_mp_supports_world_cancer_day_2017".</p> <p>"Redditch MP helps Age UK raise awareness of new vital service. http://www.redditchadvertiser.co.uk/news/16393761.redditch-mp-helps-age-uk-raise-awareness-of-new-vital-service/".</p> <p>"Speak up about climate change – As part of the Speak Up Week of Action 2017, Plymouth MP Luke Pollard (center) meets with Sustainable Earth Institute Director Professor Iain Stewart and CAFOD's Simon Giarchi at a local campaigning event to talk about tackling climate change. https://cafod.org.uk/Campaign/Climate/Speak-Up-Week".</p> <p>"Wakefield, Stronger Together Event with Mary Creagh MP. https://mend.org.uk/news/wakefield-stronger-together-event-mary-creagh-mp/".</p> <p>"MP helps launch new mental health project in Stanley. http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/14832295.MP_helps_launch_new_mental_health_project_in_Stanley/".</p> <p>"Climate week of action success- In 2016 Andy Burnham MP visited St Mary's Catholic High School, Astley, to discuss climate change with 20 CAFOD young leaders. https://cafod.org.uk/News/Campaigning-news/Climate-Week-of-Action".</p> <p>"Oldham East and Saddleworth MP pledge support for 11,076 carers across the borough. https://saddind.co.uk/oldham-east-and-saddleworth-mp-pledges-support-for-11076-carers-across-borough/".</p>
Cause-Related Marketing	-
Community Volunteering	<p>"Local MP gets 'hands on' in Starbeck. http://www.andrewjonesmp.co.uk/local-mp-gets-hands-on-in-starbeck/".</p> <p>"Anna Turley MP offers a helping hand at Kidney Research UK charity shop. https://www.kidneyresearchuk.org/news/Anna-Turley-visits-Redcar-shop".</p> <p>"UK Conservatives back in Rwanda – CLOSE to 50 members of the ruling British Conservative Party yesterday arrived in Rwanda – CLOSE to 50 members of the ruling British Conservative Party yesterday arrived in Rwanda for the fourth phase of 'Project Umubano'. https://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/82219".</p>
Social Marketing	-

social responsibility gathered were related to philanthropy in Ghana (see Figure 1). Cause promotions represent 31% of the online reports on political party social responsibility in Ghana. In the Ghanaian case, philanthropic and casue promotions gestures were found to be very common among political

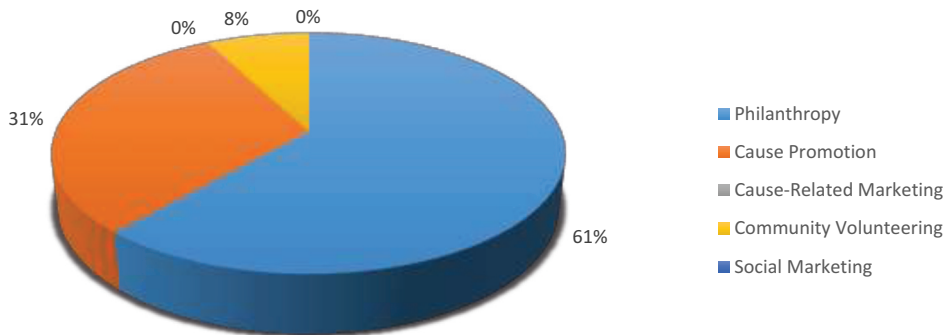


Figure 1. Summary of social responsibility activities of political parties and candidates in Ghana.

parties while other forms of CSR, such as cause-related marketing, community volunteerism and social marketing, were not widely reported. This is an indication that these forms of CSR are not usually adopted by political parties in Ghana. In the case of the UK, a similar case of cause promotions and philanthropy dominate social responsibility online reports of political parties. However, the UK case is not overly concentrated on philanthropy. Cause promotions accounted for 50% of the online reports, while 29% of online reports were on philanthropy (see [Figure 2](#)). The emphasis on these two CSR initiatives is an indication that political parties regardless of whether in developed or developing economies have a narrow view of CSR.

Study 2

Study 2 is an experimental design. An experimental design is a plan for experimenting and usually for a hypothetical product in marketing research (Kuhfeld et al., 1994). The study was conducted using experimentation to generate responses when voters are informed about the CSR activities of a political party/candidate. After the presentation of the scenario to participants, they were then presented a questionnaire to indicate their perception of CSR activities of the hypothetical political party/candidate, their satisfaction about the political party/candidate, their preference of the political party/candidate, and their intentions to vote for the political party/candidate. The participants were exposed to the research scenario (Appendix A) in a classroom setting. The scenario contains a list of CSR initiatives of a hypothetical political party/candidate. Scenarios in CSR research has been used to develop statements depicting CSR activities of organizations (see Abrantes Ferreira et al., 2010; Carvalho et al., 2010; Sheikh & Beise-Zee, 2011).

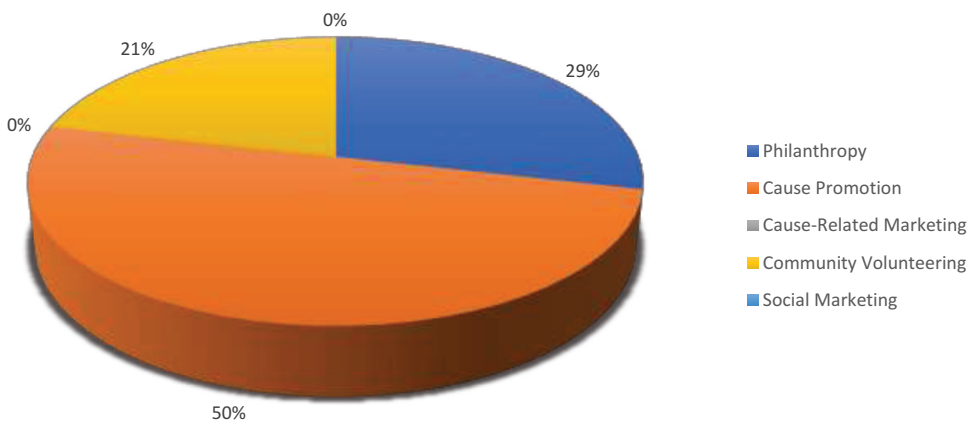


Figure 2. Summary of social responsibility activities of political parties and candidates in the UK.

In line with the proposed research hypothesis, a study involving 173 participants were used to test from the effect of CSR on voters' behavior. A non-probabilistic sample used for this study includes MBA and Undergraduate marketing students from two leading public universities and a private university in Ghana. Among the 173 respondents, females constituted 32.4% representing 56 respondents while male constituted 67.6% indicating 117. The results obtained indicates that the majority of respondents were within the age group of 18–24 years as they formed 47.4%. This was followed by those within the age group 31–40 years, and next were those with the age group of 25–30 years. Those who are above 41 years and took part in the study formed 6.4% representing 11 potential voters. MBA student were 72 in number (41.7%) while the undergraduate marketing students were 101 (58.3%). Of all the respondents, 23 were registered party members (13.3%), 48 were party sympathizers (27.7%), and 102 were not aligned to any party (59%).

Operationalization of variables

The independent variable (CSR perception of political party/candidate) was adapted from Brown and Dacin (1997). CSR perception is measured using three items on a five-point scale “on the following issues 1) the political party/candidate shows concern for the environment, 2) the political party/candidate shows involvement in the community, 3) the political party/candidate makes investments in worthwhile causes”. Respondents were asked to show the extent to which they “agreed” or “disagreed” to the statements. The use of this CSR scale from Brown and Dacin (1997) measures perceived CSR in experimental studies aimed at ensuring the scale covers many aspects of CSR activities.

Voter satisfaction scale was adapted from O’Cass (2002). Three items including 1) satisfaction of political party 2) satisfaction with political party candidate 3) general satisfaction with political party and candidates were used to develop a five-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to indicate their “agreement” or “disagreement” to the questions. The wording of the items was improved to depict the experimental nature of this study.

Political party preference was adapted from customer brand preference scale by M. T. Liu et al. (2014b). The scales were modified to suit the political party/candidate brand since they were initially used in the hotel industry. Four item scales “used were 1) It will make sense always to choose Political Party X/candidate even when others have better promises 2) Political Party X/candidate would easily be my first choice during elections 3) If there is another political party promising a better offer, I still prefer Political Party X/candidate 4) I will have a strong preference for Political Party X/candidate”.

Voting intentions scale was adopted from Yoon et al. (2005), which used one item to measure the willingness to vote for a political candidate. The other two items “I would recommend this political party/candidate to others”, and “the probability I would vote for this political party is high” were adapted from a customer behavioral intention study by Cronin et al. (2000). The wording of the items was changed to reflect voting intentions.

Analysis

We first assessed the measurement model to determine the interrelationship between the items and its constructs to ensure that the items are measuring the constructs formulated for the study. Validity is one performed to ensure that the constructs measure what it is expected to measure. The convergent validity test can determine the proportion of variance explained by the constructs (Hair et al., 2016). In other words, the standardized loadings of the items must be greater than 0.50 to ensure that the constructs converge according to Hair et al. (2016). The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) shows that the standardized regression weight or the loadings of the items were greater than 0.7. This result in Table 4 shows that the items have good loadings, which means that there is construct convergent validity. The CFA also indicates an acceptable model fit, $\chi^2 = 1.626$, CFI = 0.985, SRMR = 0.042, RMSEA = 0.060, and PClose = 0.215 (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Schreiber et al., 2006).

The intercorrelations among constructs are included in Table 5. The intercorrelation coefficient tests for discriminant validity were all found to be acceptable, given that different constructs were not perfectly correlated. Results reported for composite reliability (CR), Cronbach alpha (CA), and

Table 4. Measures and measurement loadings.

Construct and measures	Estimate	C.R.
Voter satisfaction		
I will be satisfied to vote for political party X in the next elections	0.965	
I will be satisfied to vote for a candidate in political party X in the next elections	0.958	30.711
I will be generally satisfied with political party/candidate X, I will vote for them in the next election	0.931	26.532
Voting Intentions		
I would vote for this political party/candidate X in future elections	0.919	
I would recommend this political party/candidate X to others	0.933	21.912
The probability I would vote for this political party/candidate X is high	0.948	23.038
Political Party Preference		
If there is another political party promising better offer, I still prefer political party/candidate X	0.863	
It will make sense to always choose political part/candidate X even when others have better promises	0.800	13.286
Political party/candidate X would easily be my first choice during elections	0.929	17.589
I have a strong preference for political party/candidate X	0.898	16.446
Perceived CSR of Political Party		
Political party X makes investments in causes that are worth while	0.729	
Political party X shows involvement in local community	0.875	10.072
Political party X shows concern for the environment	0.806	9.748

Table 5. Construct intercorrelations, means, standard deviations and reliabilities.

	α	CR	AVE	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4
1 Voter satisfaction	0.966	0.966	0.905	3.16	1.07	0.951			
2 Voting Intentions	0.953	0.953	0.872	2.70	.89	0.835	0.934		
3 Political Party Preference	0.928	0.928	0.764	2.61	.88	0.776	0.845	0.874	
4 Perceived CSR of Political Party	0.842	0.846	0.648	2.64	.69	0.529	0.391	0.42	0.805

average variance extracted (AVE) for all latent variables were all above the recommended threshold as suggested by Hair et al. (2016) (see Table 5).

The structural model

To test our hypotheses, we performed a structural equation modeling (SEM) after controlling for gender, age, and educational level of our respondents. The model indicated acceptable fit indices; $\chi^2 = 1.893$, CFI = 0.988, SRMR = 0.074, RMSEA = 0.072, and PClose = 0.222 as recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999) and Schreiber et al. (2006) (see Table 3).

In testing our hypotheses, the demographic variable was controlled as studies have shown that it influences consumer behavior. The results of the hypotheses show that perceived CSR of a political party significantly influences voter satisfaction ($b = 0.573$, $p \leq .01$) and that voter satisfaction increase voting intentions ($b = 0.471$, $p \leq .01$), supporting H1a and H1b respectively. In support of H2a and H2b, we find that perceived CSR of a political party significantly influences political party preference ($b = 0.462$, $p \leq .01$) and also, the findings show that voter intention to vote for a particular political party is influenced by their preference for that party ($b = .542$, $p \leq .01$)

However, perceived CSR of a political party is found to be negative and significant effect on voting intentions ($b = -0.096$, $p \leq .01$). Thus, H3 was not supported.

Analysis of indirect effects

We conducted an additional analysis of the indirect effects of perceived CSR of a political party on voting intention via voter satisfaction and customer preference for a political party (Sobel, 1982). The results revealed a significantly positive relationship between perceived CSR of a political party on voting intention ($b = 0.344$, $p \leq .01$) via voter satisfaction and perceived CSR of a political party on voting intention ($b = 0.319$, $p \leq .01$), via customer preference for political party respectively (see Table 6). Importantly, even though the direct effect of perceived CSR of a political party on voting intention is negative, the indirect effect is significantly positive, which emphasizes the importance of engaging in CSR activities that result in voter satisfaction and political party preference.

Table 6. Estimated path coefficients.

	Estimate	C.R.	P
Controls			
Gender --> Voting Intentions	-0.037	-1.240	0.215
Age --> Voting Intentions	-0.029	-0.926	0.355
Education --> Voting Intentions	-0.051	-1.617	0.106
Party membership status --> Voting Intentions	0.034	1.144	0.253
Direct Path			
Perceived CSR of Political Party --> Voter Satisfaction (H1a)	0.573	9.162	***
Voter Satisfaction --> Voting Intentions (H1b)	0.471	8.717	***
Perceived CSR of Political Party --> Political Party Preference (H2a)	0.462	6.828	***
Political Party Preference --> Voting Intentions (H2b)	0.542	10.848	***
Perceived CSR of Political Party --> Voter Intentions (H3)	-0.096	-2.644	0.008
Indirect Path (Sobel Test)			
Perceived CSR of Political Party --> Voter Satisfaction --> Voting Intentions	0.344	6.308	***
Perceived CSR of Political Party --> Political Party Preference --> Voting Intentions	0.319	5.771	***

Discussion of findings

Theoretical implications

This study has two main theoretical implications: first, the study analyzes the effect of political party social responsibility on voter satisfaction, voter preferences, and voting intentions. The study proves that CSR could be a valuable resource in marketing political parties to voters. The study findings indicate that political parties/candidates' involvement in social responsibility will significantly affect the level of satisfaction and voter preference. This supports views on the extension of the resource-based view in CSR studies in commercial marketing that CSR leads to favorable customer behaviors such as satisfaction, loyalty, brand awareness, and others. On the effect of political party social responsibility on voter satisfaction, this study found that the involvement in CSR activities by political parties and candidates will create satisfaction of the performance of the party/candidate and meet the expectations of voters. This result demonstrating the link between political party CSR and voter satisfaction is in line with findings in commercial marketing (Luo, & Bhattacharya, 2006; Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013). A theoretical contribution, therefore, is that voter satisfaction is a mediator in the link between political party CSR and voting intentions.

This is an initial attempt to develop a path to influencing voting behavior to achieve political marketing objectives. The study also reveals in the political context that, CSR has a link with a voter preference of a political party/candidate as proposed in the commercial marketing literature (see Liu et al., 2014b). Ahmed et al. (2017) in commercial marketing assert that CSR enhances brand preference, which implies that political parties and candidates stand a chance of building a reputable brand image among voters. Also, studies propose a link between brand preference and purchase (see O'Cass & Lim, 2002), thus supporting the findings of this study. Theoretically, this study advances CSR as a brand-building tool in the political arena.

Secondly, there is a need to continue the debate on the link between political party CSR and voting intentions. This study did not find a direct link between political party CSR and voting intentions. The indirect relationship between-CSR and purchase intentions has been established by several studies in commercial marketing proposing an indirect link between CSR and customer responses (Mandhachitara & Poolthong, 2011; Martínez & Del Bosque, 2013). The implication is that a simplistic depiction of the relationship between political party social responsibility and voting intentions should not be confidently accepted.

Political marketing implications

The findings of the study offer implications for political marketing theory. Our study provides an essential step in understanding how a political party can leverage CSR more strategically in gaining a competitive advantage over other political parties. The current study, therefore, extends previous research on CSR and organization performance by demonstrating its applicability in the context of political marketing. This study emphasizes the need to develop strategic social responsibility for political parties to guide the formulation and implementation of social responsibility. The use of a multiplicity of CSR initiatives by political parties will help develop valuable resources for them to achieve their objectives. Drawing from CSR studies that had applied the resource-based view, we propose that political party's social responsibility is a valuable resource that could create a competitive advantage. As proposed by McWilliams and Siegel (2011), organizations must not just implement social initiatives, but must have a CSR strategy. There currently seems to be little strategic direction on implementing CSR initiatives by political parties. Political parties must prioritize and invest in CSR in the same manner that they invest in other party strategies that create benefits both to the political parties and society.

This study makes a call for a strategic focus on CSR in the marketing of political parties to attain various essential marketing objectives apart from just voting behavior. We do not expect the use of a simplistic model to explain that voters will choose a political party/candidate as a result of CSR initiatives embarked on. A practical implication is that these CSR initiatives must be targeted at enhancing the satisfaction of voters and society while also aiming to improve the brand image of a political party or candidate. Little is known now on how political parties can affect voting behavior using CSR. Political parties might use CSR to attain other important voting behavior antecedents, thus ultimately increasing the chances of gaining votes. One crucial marketing implication is that value creation in political marketing also implies the benefits voters gain from the marketing adopted by political parties.

Limitations and future research

Despite the immense contribution of this paper to the theoretical and practical development of political marketing, the results should be viewed in light of its limitations. The first is related to the focus of the data collection in a particular country for study 2, thus, affects generality and validity of the results in other countries. We therefore call for more studies on political parties social responsibility in other countries. Secondly, the study used a scenario of a hypothetical political party/candidate. Despite the use of this approach in some CSR studies, considerable research using real-life political parties could be used. The use of a known political party or candidate may present reliable results to inform the practicability of the concept in political marketing. Further studies could consider an in-depth qualitative analysis of political party social responsibility to provide evidence of the use of the concept.

Thirdly, the analysis to establish the effect of CSR on voter satisfaction, preference, and intentions did not take into consideration some other factors. There is the possibility that a political party in power and an opposition party may have a different approach to CSR and also may affect voters behavior differently. Further studies are needed to draw a comparison between CSR by parties in power and those in opposition. Finally, our use of perceived CSR and its effect on voter satisfaction, preference, and intentions did not take a good look at the cause-effect link. Our study was focused on the perception of voters relating to the scenario created. Further studies which may be longitudinal could be done to measure changes in voter behavior as a result of a political party or candidate involvement in CSR.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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