# Opinion-leading role of politically aware consumers

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**Abstract**
*In political system, voters belong to diverse nature of communities. These communities have their own particular set of voting behaviors that emerged out from an ongoing social-interaction process. Similarly, their voting intentions are the outcome of their participation in social networks and learning from community's socialization process. Where, social agents play very significant and influential contribution in shaping the community's overall voting behavior. These social agents influence and are influenced by the community members during the process. This research begins to address the opinion leading role of opinion leaders in community's overall voting behaviors and in political brand building at constituency level. This is done by conceptualizing a socialization process model that is empirically evaluated by surveying and collecting 550 valid responses from registered voters of selected constituency. A carefully designed questionnaire was used to collect the empirical data from the respondents. The structural equation modeling technique was employed to analyze the possible relationship between the different constructs of the conceptualized model. Study in hand concludes that opinion leaders play very important role in convincing and wining the voters for a particular political party through provision of relevant information, brand advocacy and powerful word-of-mouth within their electoral communities. Furthermore, they exert high social pressure on political parties to fulfill the specific requirements of their relevant communities.*

## Introduction

It has been regarded in political literature that communities have very powerful role in the voting behavior of its electorates. However, their roles vary due to their diverse social arrangements and level of participation in politics. These communities share common understanding, have their own routines, formal and informal rules and practices (Toral et al., 2009) and voting intentions depending on their learning process. One of the fundamental mechanisms of these communities is their social participation level that results in the creation of knowledge that is inseparable of the social context (Wenger, 1998; Pan and Leidner, 2003). Level of interaction between politicians and communities varies based on their participation and involvement in the politics. Some communities are very active and play very influential roles in their respective electorates and have significant interaction with a variety of politicians (Phipps et al., 2010). These powerful communities always have important, influential and demanding role and seek political leaders to fulfill their requirements. On the other side of the spectrum these communities provide the needed access of politicians to the potential voters.

The communities voting intentions are mutually depended on individual's learning to trust each other. Therefore, the common understanding is not just 'what you know' (human capital) or 'whom you know' (relationship capital) but 'who you know well to trust' (social capital) that results in favorable outcomes (Smith, 2005). Some individuals in communities

achieve relatively high superiority or influence with their peers. They constitute "core groups" and they gain respect in the heart, mind and stories of peers and this does not happen due to their authority rather because they have attained legitimacy (Kleiner, 2003). These influential people termed here as 'Opinion Leaders' have relevantly greater contact with mass media, are more cosmopolitan, have more interaction with change agents, have elevated socioeconomic status, high participative role in social system, and are exceptionally important for interpersonal networks whose members differ in many features (Kautz and Larsen, 2000). Similarly, the perception about politicians or political parties varies from community to community. Politicians rely and expected high vote turn out from the communities with which they had strong and positive interaction (Phipps et al., 2010). Politicians enhance their vote bank through their collaboration with opinion leaders who support them and communicate their brand in their communities. In this study the political socialization process model is constructed to evaluate the role of social actors in community's socialization process, the degree of their influence on each other due to their position and the role of opinion leaders (political knowledgeable consumers) in shaping the behavior of voters during the community's political socialization process.

## Political socialization process

The individual voter's learning is based on the community mindset. There are a number of social factors and actors who play active role in the political socialization process including, parents, family, friend, teacher, mode of study (Dostie-Goulet, 2009), demographic factors (Fuse and Hanada, 2009), opinion leaders (Richey, 2008) and many more. The learning process and behavior of voters is substantially influences by mainly three social actors' community, opinion leader and individual voter. These actors have impact on the each others behavior and also have collective contributed in community's overall voting behavior. Among them, the opinion leaders have very influential role in the community's learning process due to their constant provision of information, knowledge and the power of their word-of-mouth. There are certain other mediating variable (including Openness, Trust, Strength of relations and Word-of-mouth) that mobilize the socialization process and facilitate the social actors in developing the effective political socialization process. The important role of these mediating variables has been elaborated below.

**Openness:** The consistent and widespread flow of information is very important for the development of strong political awareness in the democratic political system. But, the freedom to disseminate political information and awareness depends on the openness of the system prevailing in the country. Therefore, the openness to discuss politics is complemented by a democratic political system that is conducive to the openness (Splichal, 2006). This type of effective system supports the freedom of expression, openness and formation of public opinion. Where, the resident of the country are free to discuss politics, can openly criticize the government policies, media is freely and openly practiced without any pressure, and the government stands accountable.

The people who frequently engaged in the politics discussion in the community become the more informed voters (Kaye & Johnson, 2002; Lupia & Sin, 2003). Furthermore, the political discussions and freedom of expression are the fundamental elements of any democratic society that facilitate the voters to take better informed decisions (Baker, 1989). These informed voters have central importance in the effective operation of democratic political system (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, 1963; Picard, 1985). This political openness facilitates the individual voters and the opinion leaders to strongly develop an interactive community to deliberately

discuss political affairs, exchange views, criticize the policies, evaluate the parties and eventually develop the public opinion that strengthen the democratic endeavors.

**Trust:** Trust is considered as the fundamental and vital element that contributes widely in the political socialization process. The trustful societies enable its residents to have strong human relationships and facilitate the constant flow of information (Elliot and Yannopoulou, 2007). Deutsch (1958) defines the trust as the willingness to be dependent on each other in the belief that other person will not deliberately disappoint them. According to Dwyer and Oh (1987) "trust reflects the people's expectation from others by desiring coordination, fulfillment of their obligations, and pulling its weight in their relationship." However, other researchers viewed trust as perceived validity in the action of each other (Bagozzi, 1975), social relationship based on investment of resources, authority, or responsibility to secure the future (Shapiro, 1987), commitment to a mutual cause (Gro¨nroos, 1990) and believing in the moral integrity (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994). Trust plays vital role in the attitude, behavior and opinion formation of the electorates. Because, if the trust is lost it affects attitude toward politicians and even in democratic institutions and procedures (Dalton, 2004: Stolle & Hooghe, 2005). Furthermore, trust is a key motive for the political participation and the society having elevated trust always has high level of political participation (Lenard, 2005). Therefore, political socialization process depends on trusting each other in the community.

**Strength of relation:** The effective political system has strong and fairly stable relationships among the voters. The basic units of such a political system are not individuals, but their position in the network or the role they perform and the relations between these positions (Knoke, 2003). These relations require appropriate behavior and particular strength of interaction among social actors having varied role positions (Nadel, 1957). The strength of these relations depends on the level and regularity of interactions. Because, in formal role setting there are different role and positions empowered by hierarchical arrangement in which social actors have strong relations by interacting regularly and frequently. Therefore, the strength of relationship is not the social actors but the role and position they occupy in the social network. Similarly, in the political system, the incumbent role occupy by different politicians come and go, but the arrangement of positions among social actors remain quite stable (Knoke, 2003).

The stability of political system is based on the patterns of social relations among positions, comprising of direct-indirect, and formal-informal social position ties (Laumann and Pappi, 1976). The positions of the social actors have more influential role in shaping the attitude and behavior of the other social counterparts (Beck et al., 2002) and facilitate the process of political information flow (Huckfeldt, 2007). Strong relationships facilitate the political socialization process by enhancing the communication range, confidence, loyalty, and opinion formation. Moreover, the voters are more influenced by the like-minded acquaintances by adopting their attractive source of voting behavior (Burt, 1987). According to the study of Campbell et al. (1960) the partisan loyalty are largely influenced by the social interaction of the electorates with other actors of the community. Therefore, the effective socialization process is dependent on the strength of relations among the electorates of the community because, their voting behavior and voting decision are largely influence by other social actors.

**Word-of-mouth (wom):** Word-of-Mouth operates as an interpersonal channel to convey information (Arndt, 1967) that requires loyal customers (voters), committed to a particular brand (party) and active source of information in supporting others in brand (voting) decision making process. Generally, WoM comes from relatives and friends having close relationship

with recipients of the information. Therefore, the recipients consider it as a most trustworthy source and commonly do not perceive it as a marketing tool (Derbaix and Vanhamme, 2003). Firms also recruit internal professional agents to disseminate relevant and encouraging information among target audience in a professional, specific and purposeful way (Carl, 2006; Goldenberg et al., 2001). The perceptions of the WoM could be positive or negative. Therefore, positive and favorable WoM enhance voting possibilities for potential political decision makers, whereas negative and unfavorable WoM tend to communicate complaints and dissatisfactions and ultimately has an opposite effect (Litvin et al., 2008).

Analogous to face-to-face interactions, Internet WoM (eMoW) plays important function to disseminate information and in formation of brand equity and customer level. In politics, WoM is considered as a fundamental element of the learning process of the voters. The interpersonal discussions has influential role in shaping the voting behavior (Beck et al., 2002). Similarly, the voters of the community are mutually interdependent and politically interconnected. Therefore, their political decisions are mutually interdependent on each other for information and guidance (Huckfeldt et al., 2007). Moreover, they frequently discuss politics with ideologically similar counterparts and influenced by the WoM of the like-minded individuals. The WoM is also very important in the development of party or politician's political image. As it consists of how voters perceived information related to politicians disseminated by the word-of-mouth in everyday communication with the social agents (Parents, friends and relatives) and thus contributes in emotional appeal of the party (Cwalina et al., 2000). Therefore, the WoM are very powerful in spreading messages from individual to individual as compared to other media sources and political campaigning.

The relationships among three aforementioned social actors based on mediating contributors are visualized in the figure 1. The conceptualized model of political socialization process represents these relationships among community, individual voter and opinion leader in two loops.

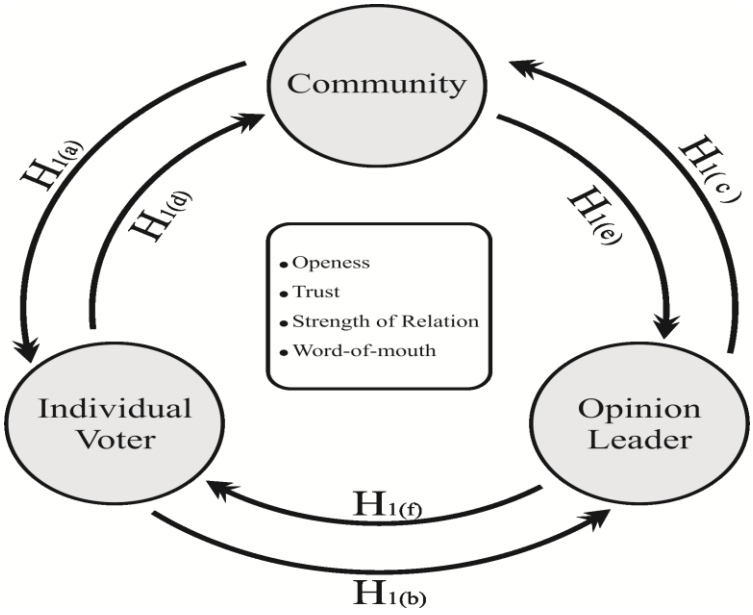


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Political Socialization Process

Outer loop of the conceptualized model represents the relationships between the social actors and source of influence from community to individual voter, from individual voter to

opinion leader and from opinion leader to community. The inner loop of the conceptualized model represents their relationship and source of influence from individual voter to community, from community to opinion leader and from opinion leader to individual voter. These two way relationship ties demonstrate that in the socialization process each actor influence the remaining two actors in the network and in return other two actors influence that actor. The conceptualized model also exhibits that the interaction among these three social actors is an ongoing process that is vulnerable to the external environment. Within the community these three actors play a vital role in shaping the behavior of each other and eventually reflect the voting behavior of the community as a whole.

## Research hypotheses

The conceptual model of political socialization process was subjected to the empirical analysis to validate the relations and their potential effects on each other. Role and interrelations of Community, Opinion Leader and Individual Voter were analyzed to validate their impact on the socialization process. It was conceptualized that the relations among aforementioned community actors is an ongoing process and each actor effects other two actors and on the same lines as the two actors effects the first actor exhibited in the figure 1. In this way the socialization process is dependent on the level and strength of interaction among these three actors in terms of continuous process. Therefore, six relations among these actors were hypothesized to evaluate the strength or relations and their effects on each other.

H1 Political Socialization Process will be positively associated with the participation level of the community, individual voters and opinion-leader.

Following hypothesis, elaborate this socialization process in parts.

***The first set of the hypotheses represents the outer loop of the socialization cycle given in the figure 1***

H1 (a) Higher is the social interaction of community members, higher will be the participative role of its individuals.

H1 (b) Higher is the active participation level of the individuals, higher will be their influence on the opinion leader.

H1 (c) Higher is the participation level of Opinion leaders the higher will be their influence on the community.

***The second set of hypotheses represents the inner loop of this socialization cycle, as follows:***

H1 (d) Higher is the change in individuals' voting behavior higher will be the change in community's overall behavior.

H1 (e) Higher is the cohesion among the community members, higher will be their influence on the opinion leader.

H1 (f) Higher is the participation level of opinion leaders, higher will be their influence on shaping the individual's behavior.

***Following hypothesis represents influence of the opinion leader on the voting behavior.***

H1 (g): Active participation of opinion leaders plays a central role in shaping the voting behavior.

## Research methodology

**Survey instrument**

Empirical validation of the conceptualized model requires a valid and reliable measurement scale to conclude logical, reality-based and widely acceptable results. Therefore, to accomplish the said objective, a questionnaire was developed through a series of steps consisting of measurement scales for each item. Similarly, the important general demographic information related to the respondents, supported by the literature, was also included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire has been divided into two parts. The first part was based on the demographic variables and the second part was based on the role of the Community, Opinion Leader and Individual Voter in the socialization process. This part was measured using the five point Likert scale identified after reviewing the relevant literature. In this scale "1" indicated least favorable degree of agreement and "5" indicated the most favorable degree of agreement. The questionnaire was originally developed in the English language and for the validation purposes the questionnaire was initially tested by variety of respondents including academicians, Political Opinion Leaders, Politicians, and by the registered voters of the selected community. The value of reliability coefficient Cronbach's Alpha were measured for each item and found to be above 0.960 for all items. The results of the questionnaire based on the reliability Cronbach's Alpha were incorporated and questionnaire was finalized as a measurement instrument to gather information from the respondents. The purpose of this exercise was to develop a measuring instrument that was critically analyzed and provided the meaningful measure to evaluate the Political Brand Equity development process for the selected political parties.

**Sample size**

The electorates of the Constituency NA-105, from District Gujrat, a designated seat for member of the National Assembly of Pakistan, were selected as the sample-population for this research. According to the election-2008, there were 332332 registered voters in the constituency (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2011). To validate the hypothesized casual relationships, an optimal sample size was required that estimates the population parameters and justify the requirement of study in hand. The specified requirement of the sample is that the respondents should be registered voter of the NA-105 constituency. The total population of registered voters in the said constituency (i.e. 332332) was treated as research frame to extract the sample size. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) data analysis technique has been selected to validate the relations among theoretical constructs. Therefore, it is mandatory requirement to calculate and select the sample size that justifies the requirements of SEM.

Schreiber et al. (2006) supported the fact that required sample size is affected by the normality of the data and estimation method used by the researcher. He further supported the fact that, the value for every free parameter estimate, responses against each parameter generally - agreed by majority of the researcher- is 10. To achieve the most precise sample size, some researchers have suggested to have 30 responses against each variable to be analyzed (Hair et al., 2007). Similarly, McQuitty (2004) suggested that to attain the desired level of statistical support with a given model, it is very important to calculate the minimum sample size prior to data collection. Generally, the minimum sample size is to have five (5) responses against each parameter to be analyzed. However, the more acceptable sample size is based on the ten (10) responses against each parameter (McQuitty, 2004). According to above sited suggestion to have 10 responses against each parameter, the finalized sample size for this study, meeting all

possible statistical requirements of SEM was 565. Therefore, a total number of 565 respondents were surveyed by using the questionnaire as a measurement instrument.

## Data collection

The recommended empirical data was gathered by surveying 565 respondents. The survey teams continued the data collection process until they received the predefined (565) number of the questionnaires. After a thorough and painstaking scrutiny process of the collected date for finalizing it for the Entering process. Through data collection exercise, a total of 550 valid responses were collected from the respondents. The responses outcome of this exercise was 97.4%. These responses were coded and entered into the SPSS software. The codified data was further analyzed by using the STATISTICA software version 7. The structural equation modeling technique was employed to analyze the possible relationship between the different constructs of the conceptualized model. Before testing this model by SEM technique, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis is used for the confirmation of each item for all factors as it is the pre-requisite of SEM. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis is applied to check whether the constructs used in the study are fulfilling the CFA criteria and basic assumptions. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique is run to evaluate the relations between the constructs in order to achieve the strength of influence on each other in the political socialization process.

## Descriptive statistics

The results of descriptive statistics are calculated for all variables and results of some of the important variables are discussed here. These results (Table 1) provide easy summaries about the sample. The result shows that the percentage of male respondents is 61.5% while the percentage of females is 38.5%. It indicates that more than half of the respondents are male. The majority of the respondents from the age group 18-30 and the remaining three groups almost have equal participation. However, the respondents from the age group above 51 years are only 15.1%. The remaining demographic data is given in the table 1.

**Table 1: Demographic Data**

| **Gender** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male% | | Female% | |
| 61.5 | | 38.5 | |
| **Age Group (%)** | | | |
| 18 – 30 | 31 – 40 | 41 – 50 | 51 and Above |
| 43.8 | 19.5 | 21.6 | 15.1 |
| **Qualification (%)** | | | |
| Illiterate | 7.3 | Inter | 19.6 |
| Read and Write | 11.1 | Graduation | 17.3 |
| Primary | 4.7 | Post Graduation | 13.1 |
| Secondary | 3.6 | Diploma | 7.1 |
| Matriculation | 11.8 | Any Other | 4.4 |
| **Monthly Income (%)** | | | |
| Not at all | 25.6 | 31,000-40,000 | 8.7 |
| Less than 10,000 | 16.2 | 41,000-50,000 | 4.4 |
| 11,000-20,000 | 23.8 | 51,000 and Above | 3.5 |
| 21,000-30,000 | 17.8 | | |
| **Area (%)** | | | |
| Urban (%) | Rural (%) | Suburban (%) | |
| 57.3 | 24.4 | 18.4 | |
| **Job Sector (%)** | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Government | 25.5 | Any Other | .5 |
| Private | 24.9 | Don't Have | 5.6 |
| Self Employed | 28.5 | House Wife | 4.4 |
| Unemployed | 10.5 | | |
| **Profession (%)** | | | |
| Jobless | 10.5 | Security | 3.1 |
| Education | 16.5 | Student | 10.9 |
| Industry | 10.7 | Agriculture | 5.5 |
| Health | 2.2 | House Wife | 4.2 |
| Construction | 1.3 | Lawyer | 1.6 |
| Transport | 5.8 | Bankers | 2.9 |
| Business | 19.5 | Any other | 5.3 |

**Data analysis and discussion**

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to empirically validate the model shown in Figure 1 by using the STATISTICA 7.0V. A structural equation model diagram including the measurement model and the structural model was developed by extending the hypothesized relationship among the latent variables. These relationships were depicted graphically with one headed arrows as shown in Figure 1. Following are the overall model fit and tests for each research hypotheses used to indicate the relationship among Community, Opinion Leader and Individual Voter. Goodness of fit criteria given in Table 2 will be employed to evaluate the goodness of fit for the conceptualized models.

**Table 2: Goodness of fit Criteria**

| Fit Indices Criterion | Value | Reference |
|---|---|---|
| Joreskog GFI | ≥0.90 | Hu, and Bentler, 1999 |
| Joreskog AGFI | ≥0.90 | Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen, 2008 |
| Steiger-Lind RMSEA Index | ≤0.08 | MacCallum, Browne, and Sugawara, 1996 |
| Ratio of Chi-Square with Degree of Freedom | ≤3 | Kline, 2005 |
| p-level | ≤0.05 | Hair et al., 2007 |

*Source: Goodness of fit Criteria compiled by the author*

**Table 3: Model Estimates for each Model**

| Relations | Parameter Estimator | SE | T | p- value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Model Estimates for Community | | | | |
| Community → Opinion leader | 0.467 | 0.039 | 11.877 | 0.000 |
| Community →Individual voter | 0.435 | 0.040 | 10.884 | 0.000 |
| Model Estimates for Opinion Leader | | | | |
| Opinion Leader → Community | 0.452 | 0.041 | 11.135 | 0.000 |
| Opinion Leader → Individual Voter | 0.437 | 0.040 | 10.972 | 0.000 |
| Model Estimates for Individual Voter | | | | |
| Individual Voter → Community | 0.451 | 0.040 | 11.202 | 0.000 |
| Individual Voter → Opinion Leader | 0.453 | 0.039 | 11.651 | 0.000 |

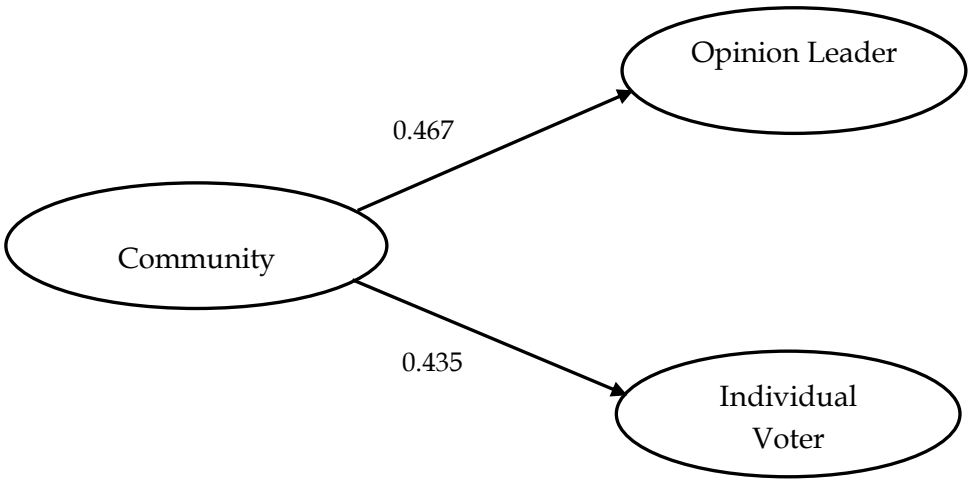


**Figure 2: Structural Model for Community**

Table 3 indicates that the p-value of all the relationships is significant one. Further, the Chi-square and other related values are used for evaluating the goodness of fit criteria of the model. The values of the fit indices for the community, Opinion Leader and Individual Voter are given in the following Table 4.

**Table 4: Goodness of Fit for each Model**

| Fit Indices | Community | Opinion Leader | Individual Voter | Criterion |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Joreskog GFI | 0.943 | 0.943 | 0.941 | ≥0.90 |
| Joreskog AGFI | 0.927 | 0.927 | 0.924 | ≥0.90 |
| Steiger-Lind RMSEA Index | 0.048 | 0.047 | 0.050 | ≤0.08 |
| Ratio of Chi-Square with Degree of Freedom | 2.2573 | 2.2421 | 2.3633 | ≤3 |
| p-level | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 | ≤0.05 |

Table 4 shows that all the values are statistically significant with p-value 0.000 significance level. It is noteworthy that the community's value of Ratio of Chi-Square with Degree of Freedom is 2.2573. This value satisfies the general criteria that the ratio of Chi-square with degree of freedom should not exceed the value of 3. Therefore, the value of

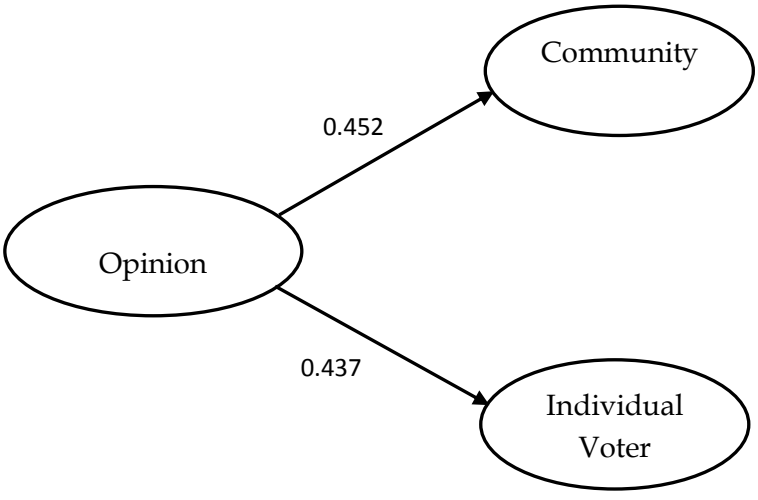


**Figure 3: Structural Model for Opinion Leader**

Chi-square/d.f = 2.2573 is reasonably acceptable. Similarly, the other results in the Table 4 show that the estimated model fit indices and demonstrate the statistical significant value of other criterions. Therefore, the goodness of fit criteria given in Table 4 indicates the good fit of the model and the model reasonably fits to the data. From these results, it is concluded that there is a notable relationship of community with opinion leader and individual voter. Furthermore, it implies that community has indeed positive affect on the opinion leader and individual voter.

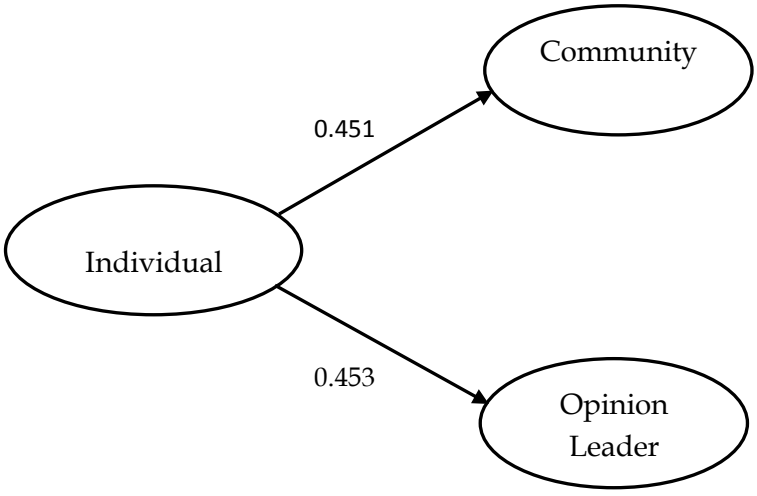


**Figure 4: Structural Model for Individual Voter**

Notably, the Opinion Leader's value of Ratio of Chi-Square with Degree of Freedom is 2.2421. This value satisfies the general criteria that the ratio of Chi-square with degree of freedom should not exceed the value of 3. Therefore, the value of Chi-square/d.f = 2.2421 is reasonably acceptable. Similarly, the other results in the Table 4 show that the estimated model fit indices and the demonstrated statistical significant value of other criterions. Therefore, the goodness of fit criteria given in Table 4 indicates the good fit of the model and the model reasonably fits the data. From these results, it is concluded that there is a notable relationship of opinion leader with community and individual voter. Furthermore, it implies that the opinion leader has indeed a positive affect on the community and individual voters.

The Individual voter's value of Ratio of Chi-Square with Degree of Freedom is 2.3633. This value satisfies the general criteria that the ratio of Chi-square with degree of freedom should not exceed the value of 3. Therefore, the value of Chi-square/d.f = 2.3633 is reasonably acceptable. Similarly, the other results in the Table 4 show that the estimated model fit indices and demonstrate the statistical significant value of other criterions. Therefore, the goodness of fit criteria given in Table 4 indicates the good fit of the model and the model is reasonable fit to the data. From these results it is concluded that there is a notable relationship of individual voter with community and opinion leader. Furthermore, it implies that individual voter has indeed positive affect on the community and opinion leader. The table 4 indicates that the p-value of all the relationships is significant. The value Chi-square/d.f for all the relationship is less than 3. Similarly, the results in Table2 exhibits the estimated model fit indices and demonstrate their significant values. Therefore, the goodness of fit criteria given in abovementioned tables indicates the good fit of the model. From Above results, the fitted structural models can be combined as given in figure 5.

The models data confirms the significant and positive association among the social agents of the community. Therefore, all the stated hypotheses are confirmed. The magnitude of values among these three social actors indicates that all three actors have very crucial and important role in shaping the community's overall voting behavior. The model reflects that in the powerful

there is communities greater

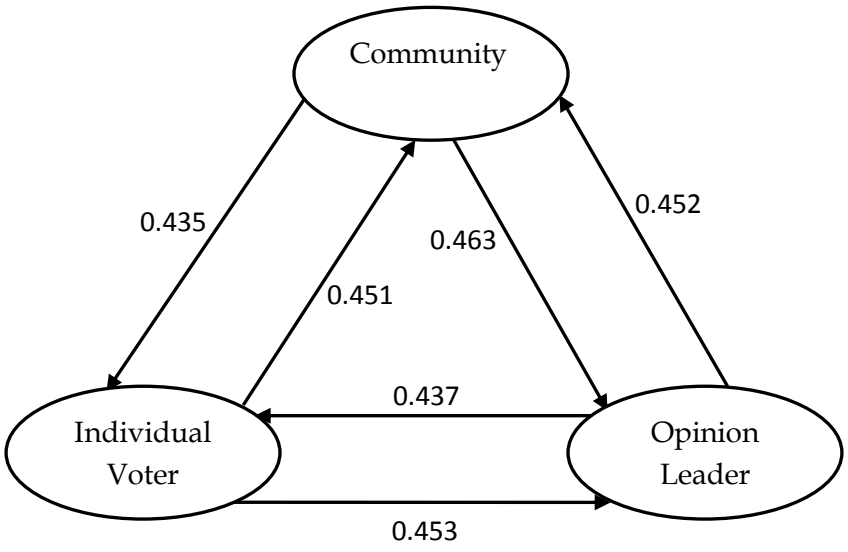


**Figure 5: The Structural Diagram of Overall Socialization Process**

the pressure on the opinion leaders as compared to the individual voters in the determining the voting intentions for a particular political party. Communities are willing to vote for that political party whose political manifesto is possibly matching their particular set of requirements. Therefore, this is the job of opinion leaders to negotiate and exert pressure on political parties in meeting their requirements. Furthermore, the opinion leaders have to bridge the interaction between their communities and the competing political parties. The sampled constituency has number of diverse communities few of them are very strong and based on caste system, geographical locations, religious intensity, and particular set of requirements like business communities. The structural model reflects that the opinion leaders of the sampled constituency are being influenced by both the individual voters and overall community. Therefore, their prime job is to influence the political parties to meet their community's requirements. If a party fails to do so, the electorates will not cast vote for that political party in the coming elections. This is obvious from the last six (1988-2008) general elections that the electorates of this constituency have the history to change their voting preferences and political affiliations for different political parties.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that electorates from the community participate in the political brand advocacy and in developing community-based party equity. However, the level of their contribution depends on community network, they belong to. These community networks are distinguished on the basis of voters' cohesion, knowledge, access to the information, frequency of interaction, and specific party loyalty. In addition, the socialization process of the community is the key contributor in the voting behavior of the voters. The strength of socialization process depends on community's openness, electorates trust on the political parties, strength of voters' relation with each other and with political representatives, and prevailing word-of-mouth regarding particular political party. It is also concluded that in community's socialization process the three social agents, community, individual voter and opinion leader, have an influential role in deciding the level of voters' political participation and interest. Furthermore, these agents have major contribution in shaping the attitude of the voters towards a particular political party. These social agents influence each others behavior toward a particular political party and the overall community's behavior is the amalgamation of social agent's behavior through an ongoing process. Furthermore, the electorates' behavior in the community is highly vulnerable to the knowledge and information coming from different fronts. Therefore, the opinion leaders play very important role in changing the voting intentions of the community's electorates. This study also supports the substantial and influential role of the opinion leaders between political party and the community through brand advocacy and word-of-mouth. However, this study reflects that the opinion leaders are being influenced by the individual voters and community itself to exert pressure on the political parties in meeting their particular set of requirements.

## Practical implications

The study herein, for the first time ever, has conceptualized the community's political socialization process model by considering the influential role of social agents; community, individual voter and opinion leaders in logical linked steps given as hierarchy of effect model. Furthermore, the role of opinion leader has been identified and emphasized in shaping the overall voting intensions of electorates in the community. These opinion leaders are bridging between political parties and the voters in the community network. Therefore, political parties would have opportunities to identify these opinion leaders who could play very significant and influential role in convincing and wining the voters for a particular political party through brand advocacy and powerful word-of-mouth within their electoral communities.

This study would be very useful for political parties to compare different constituencies on the basis of their diversified social dynamics and political knowledge. This comparison would facilitate them to align their political strategies with the communities' requirements by incorporating their demands and expectation related to particular political party. The constituency based manifesto, may also be termed as "Localized Manifesto", will help them to improve their political position by informing and improving political brand management practices that will support voters to identify and differentiate their polices in long run. The results of the study in hand strongly suggest that reorganization and incorporation of communities would provide substantial improvement in the voting preferences and political brand equity. However, this research is just a beginning and limited to only a few claims. The dimensions and scope of the conceptualized model used herein should be extended by considering a large number of constituencies, political parties, different electoral systems and philosophies of different political parties.

## Limitations and further research avenues

The validation of the proposed model was based on the data collected from only one constituency that could raise concerns about the affect of communities' nature and political importance of the constituency. Therefore, the study's results could not be generalized.

Future research can test the proposed model by expanding the sample base, including new constituencies, and geographical areas to increase the generalizability of this research findings as this model has substantial future extendibility and potential. This effort will undertake to explore new research ventures to understand the voters' mindset influenced by their gregariousness interaction in a community. In addition, the developed model may be expanded to the commercial brand management by considering the social interaction of the consumers as Community-Effect variable on their responses toward a particular product or service. Another interesting possibility with this model would be to adopt a longitudinal approach over the duration of an election to measure the volatility in the attitude and preferences of the voters due to the active role of opinion leaders. The results of the longitudinal approach could be employed further to evaluate the effectiveness of different dimension studied in the political socialization model.

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