

## Cybernetic Model of Voting Behavior

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this research paper is to review the theories on voting behavior. Apart from providing a brief review of the theories, the main contribution of this research paper lies in drawing a parallel between customer decision-making models of Marketing Management domain in the discipline of Business Administration and invoking the same as a separate theoretical viewpoint here with reference to the voters' decision-making. Finally, the paper gives a model of voting behavior from a cybernetics model perspective wherein the role of social factors as well as personal factors is underlined as to how they influence the individual voter in response to the broader environmental factors like the national and international policy factors.

**Keywords.** Voting behavior, Political parties, Cybernetics.

**JEL.** D72, P20, C70.

### 1. Introduction

Political socialization implies political participation. One of the ways in which political participation may be ensured is through voting. Drawing parallels from disciplines other than the parent ones is as much academic (Boix Mansilla, Gardner, & Miller, 2000; Brew, 2008; Lyon, 1992) as having in-depth understanding of the parent discipline. This research paper is a review of the existing theories of voting behavior in the field of political science and the main contribution lies in extending the theoretical frameworks by invoking the consumer decision-making models from the domain of marketing management. Lastly, a holistic framework is given where the cybernetics has been invoked to describe a model in which the various factors which impact a voter in his/her decision-making have been covered.

### 2. Sociological theories

A succinct theoretical perspective was given vis-à-vis an individual's personality and his/her voting decision which posited that voting is a function of an individual's personality (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). Further, the same study also pointed out that an individual's decision-making in elections is dependent upon the influence exercised by the social groups to which an individual belongs. Therefore, opinion leaders were identified who were instrumental in shaping the political views and inclinations of the others. Opinion leaders are those who are responsible for giving a meaning to the media messages received from extraneous sources. Further, these opinion leaders share their interpretation with the social group and influence the individual voters in making electoral choices. This theoretical perspective was fortified by the fact that voter affiliations are determined by the forces of socialization; viz., socioeconomic status, religious

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affiliation and the place where s/he resides (Anderson & Stephenson, 2010). Furthermore, it was deduced that a voter is not much influenced by the intensive campaigns of the political parties before the polls; a voter's preferences are influenced by the individuals who influence him/her the most. However, to acquire political happenings, those voters who have developed a keen interest in political landscape would prefer to stay connected with the electronic media (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1968). The preceding discussion is a testimony of the fact that voting is not an individual act and the impact of social groups is clearly evident in the decision choices such that individuals vote along with the social groups to which they belong and pay due heed to the tacit or explicit suggestions received by the relevant social group.

In the successive work (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee, 1954), it was indicated that voters do not have interest in politics. Thus, the motivation levels of an average voter are missing as far as political matters are concerned. Therefore, the knowledge of the voters with respect to the political affairs is very limited. However, in the same work, it was pointed out there are three factors which impinge upon voters' decision-making. First, social differentiation of the societal make-up influenced voting decisions. Social differentiation implies socio-economic status, religion, race and place of residence. Second, the impact of societal influences is so strong that the electoral preferences are transmitted across generations. Finally, the greater the social and physical proximity between the individuals in a group, the greater is the influence of the significant others on the individual voter. Even in this study, the role of campaigns on voting decisions was ascertained. Thus, on one hand, the role of economic policies was evaluated through these campaigns and on the other hand, the role of ideology and foreign policy was emphasized wherein voters could weigh the pros and cons of the ideological and policy stands of the political parties. Further, these campaigns served to compare the relative political stands and ideologies espoused by the different political factions. This was a two-pronged analysis wherein an individual voter had his/her own perceptions regarding his/her preferred political party and the chief leader of the political parties was on the other side flagging his/her own political agenda. What was required was a match between the voters' position and that of the leader's. Despite the aforesaid, the authors conclude that the democratic stance is not lost anytime. For them, the voting process is much social than it is individual. Thus, the authors maintain that it would be an anathema for the democratic process to flourish if all voters had greater interest in political affairs for that would be tantamount to divisiveness in the democratic fabric in the face of plurality of ideas. Thus, heterogeneity in populace is acknowledged wherein some voters are politically inclined and others are not.

The next piece of work which comes to the forefront is that of Lipset & Rokkan (1967) who have provided a historical and macro-sociological perspective by stating that the party formations in the Western Europe are a result of historical cleavages in national revolution. Such cleavages pertained to those between center and periphery or state and church. Thereafter, the industrial revolution created significant cleavages between the urban and rural and capital and labor. Both these historical cleavages had an impact on the psyche of the voters as social cleavages also took place concomitantly. Thus, diverse forms of social consciousness evolved and institutional formations came to be reflected in the interactions among the organizations and/or institutions (Bartolini & Mair, 1990). Thus, individual behavior is a function of institutional and organizational changes as also the behavioral changes.

All the aforesaid explanations have limitations in the sense that they have not taken into consideration the economic factors which influence a voter's decision choice. Thus, although sociological factors do influence the voters as far as making decisions is concerned, however, the theoretical framework fails to capture the variations which emerge in the behavior of the voters in each election. Secondly, the sociological theory fails in explaining as to what is the rationale behind an

individual's cohesiveness to a particular reference group and not to the other. Thus, what is required is to take factors like political programmes of the political parties, the role of media, economy of the country concerned and the precise nature and scope of relationship between voters and political parties into consideration (Curtice, 2002; van der Eijk, 2002; van der Eijk, Franklin & Oppenhuis, 1996; Glasgow & Alvarez, 2005; Johnson, Shively, & Stein, 2002; Wright, 1977). Lastly, the theoretical framework fails to underscore why and how are voting decisions different in every election (Antunes, 2008).

### 3. Psychosocial theories

The origin of these set of theories may be attributed to the Michigan School (Campbell, et al., 1960) and the basic premise of these theories rests on the belief that voting behavior is a function of partisanship. This implies that an individual voter's association with the political party is nothing but a kind of psychological proximity which may or may not translate into a vote. This is a form of psychological identification with the political party and this relates to the affective part of an individual's behavior. Thus, an individual decides whether s/he prefers to belong to a particular reference group or not. Further, this reference group has significant bearing on the voter's decision-making in the sense that the rules governing the reference group shape the voting decision of the individual. The values and attitudinal beliefs of an individual are defined by those espoused by their family, colleagues and friends. In sum, partisanship refers to social identification wherein individuals identify with their social groups and a sense of belongingness develops overtime with their preferred political party (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002). It may be noted, however, that partisanship does not translate to voting. Thus, partisanship is a tool for appreciating whether there is sync between his/her espoused values and those of the political party. Further, partisanship is a barometer of judging the election and the leaders' stands. Summing up, partisanship helps in evaluating leaders, the issues involved, the incidents of the campaigns that are reported in the media and the conversations which the voters might have had with their family and friends regarding the election. However, impact on partisanship is apparent when there are changes in the social status of the individuals (for instance, marital status, enrolment in higher education, change of the area of residence, change of job, etc.) or when the political landscape is jerked heavily (for instance, rise of China wall, demise of Berlin wall, launch of European Union, etc.). Such changes have a significant impact on the partisanship of the individual voter. The theory of partisanship is lacking in the sense that a clear consistent pattern is starkly missing as far as political identification is concerned. Further, there are cases of misalignment of voters as far as partisanship is concerned (Dalton, Flanagan, & Beck, 1984; Dalton, 2000, Fiorina 1981; Franklin, Mackie & Valen, 1992; Kiewiet, 1983; Wattenberg, 1994). Thus, it is probable that despite an individual's psychological affinity to a particular political party, s/he might end up voting for a different political party with changed loyalties. Voters make their preferences based on their evaluation of the country's economy or broader international and/or diplomatic ties with other countries or a major international decision impacting the country as a whole. Decisions are also made in line with their evaluation as to how the political parties and leaders forge relationship with the individual voters. In other words, party identification is a mere emotive facet and voters prefer to draw as much information as possible about the different political parties before processing the information thus received to influence their decision.

One of the significant theories under this rubric is that of the socio-cognitive theory. According to the socio-cognitive theory, an individual's socio-cognitive traits determine the voting behavior. Development of political attitudes and political interests is a function of an individual's personality (Sears, 1983). As applicable to an individual's behavior, the socio-cognitive traits stabilize or evolve over a period of time. Therefore, while jingoism might be predominant in the

youth, expediency and rationality may operate in the later years. Furthermore, an individual's identification with the political party may be linked with his/her orientation towards the political party based on his/her predilections. Another line of inquiry states that an individual's political knowledge has an important bearing on his/her voting decision. This political knowledge is an intrinsic part of an individual's cognition. Further, political thinking is a highly evolved dimension which gets formalized with an individual's age. Political thinking would mature with growing interest and involvement in political landscape. Furthermore, political thinking is a springboard of political activism wherein an individual participates in political activities with enthusiasm (Cole & Stewart, 1996).

Closely aligned with the socio-cognitive theory is the action theory which is based on expectancy-value theory which has relevance to voting research (Downs, 1957). Thus, the premise of the action theory rests on an individual's belief that in return for the fulfillment of his/her expectancies; s/he shall be motivated to take action in the form of political participation.

### 4. Rationality theory

This theory is in sharp distinction to the socio-psychological facets of voting behavior. This theory rests on the premise that voters are capable of sorting through complicated information and they can make conducive decisions. Further, their decisions are rational and concrete and are taken after a proper weighing of the issues at hand (Pomper, 1972). Thus, according to this theory, voters are able to discern the political reality and base their decision on these political realities. Although weighing of ideologies is important, voters rest their faith on the actual work done by the political party. In fact, the edifice of this theory rests on an economic explanation of voting behavior (Arrow, 1951; Downs, 1957) which implies that economic parameters-resources, goods and technology- have a bearing on political outcome or choice. This theory establishes a direct linkage between the individuals as consumers and individuals as voters as well as enterprises or businesses as political parties and businessmen as political leaders. Thus, just like businesses aim at profit maximization and consumers seek to maximize their utility, voters seek to maximize their vote's utility and the political parties aim at maximizing their electoral gains out of their political proposals. Thus, in order to maximize their profits, entrepreneurs cater to the consumers' needs by churning out products accordingly. Similarly, political parties and politicians formulate policies which are appealing to the voters. Further, the political parties design their ideologies with the objective of maximizing support from the maximum number of social groups. Just like in a marketplace, the dominance of a single brand is disrupted by operating in a niche segment, similarly, in a political system; the ideological dominance of a political party is shattered by addressing the specific concerns of voters. The rational choice theory operates on the basis that all decisions, whether made by the voters or political parties, are rational and guided by self-interest. Further, these decisions are implemented for maximizing the utility of the decision made. Also, the theory is based on the premise that predictions about the consequences of choices made are possible. At the same time, there is a marked degree of uncertainty regarding the decisions made. Furthermore, rationality in the eyes of political parties implies winning elections. From the perspective of the voters, they will vote for a political party if the utility of voting for their preferred political party outweighs that of the others. The problem with the rational theory is that it is difficult to measure the different political parties on the same yardstick unless all of them have been in power in the recent past. Thus, it would be difficult to compare two political parties in which one of them has been in power recently while the other one is new. So, while evaluating the former political party in terms of its developmental works, for instance, may be possible; however, evaluation of the other political party on this metrics may be faulty and irrational. This is precisely where the rational choice theory breaks down. Secondly, voters are unaware of the range of decisions taken by the political

parties. Therefore, information is incomplete as far making the rational decision is concerned. There remains uncertainty and doubt in the minds of the voters and the voter is forced to take a generalized decision based on the information available at hand. Further, Blais (2000) posits that voters do not vote on the basis of their rational voice but as a dutiful obligation. Furthermore, contrary to the approach adopted by this theory, voters are found to be quite consistent in their voting decisions in elections and stick to their political party under all circumstances.

## 5. Application of Consumer-Decision Models in Voters-Decision Making theoretical frameworks

As pointed out in the beginning of this research paper, the chief contribution of this research paper lies in drawing a parallel from the marketing management discipline in political science. This is called for on account of the fact that there is a close similarity between voters and consumers and the behavior of voters and consumers operates on the similar pattern as any decision-making process would progress. The second reason for drawing this perspective lays in the fact that a more detailed understanding of the models for the voters in elections shall be appreciated vis-à-vis the framework applicable for consumers in the marketplace. These models have their basis in the economic and psychological domains. As per the consumers' characteristics, eight factors may be taken into consideration, viz. perfectionistic, high-quality conscious consumer characteristic; brand conscious "price equals quality" consumer characteristic; novelty-fashion conscious consumer characteristic; recreational, hedonistic consumer characteristic; price conscious, "value for money" consumer characteristic; impulsive, careless consumer characteristic; confused by choice consumer characteristic; and habitual, brand-loyal consumer characteristic (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Likewise, drawing parallel in the elections setting, a voter resembles a consumer in all these ways. For instance, a voter is perfectionist in the sense that s/he would like to choose the best political leader and the decision would be taken with ample forethought. Some voters would be particular about picking up a political party which deserves and has been contributing in some way or the other to the voter's happiness and satisfaction. There might be voters who wish to prefer voting for a new political party as an alternative to the existing ones. Few voters might prefer experimenting with their voting choices. There might be others who might prefer political parties who provide benefits equivalent to those expected from a sound political leadership. Others might be impulsive voters and would prefer voting on the spot evaluating the trend of voting by others. Some voters might be confused looking at the number of political parties and their ideologies and would remain indecisive. There might be others who might prefer sticking to one political party under all circumstances.

### 5.1. Nicosia Model

This model was proposed (Nicosia, 1966) for explaining consumer behavior and rested on four 'fields' (communication of information to influence the buyer's attitude; search and evaluation; decision, and outcomes in terms of consumption, storage, experience and feedback). A close parallel may be drawn with that of the elections, where the political leaders influence the voters through intensive campaigning first. Thereafter, the voter analyses the political parties and evaluates them. Then, the voter makes a decision of voting a particular political party. Finally, the voter perceives the utility of having exercised his/her decision. Nicosia (1966) had proposed a continuous cycle and the same is evident in the elections too. However, during the elections, the cycle is periodic and not as continuous as one might imagine.

The model has limitations in the sense that the model has been discussed from the perspective of a marketer and not from that of the consumer. Similarly, in elections, the voting behavior may be better gauged from the perspective of a voter

instead of the political leader. A second facet to this model is that it has not explained the risk and uncertainty involved in exercising one's choice. Similarly, a voter is faced with the risk and uncertainty as far as exercising his/her vote is concerned.

### *5.2. Engel, Kollat and Blackwell Model (1968)*

This model is a revision of the model proposed by Nicosia. In this model, there is a feedback or 'search' loop which permits iterations of partial decision-making. In this model, a buyer performs an external search for more information and if dissatisfied, s/he may opt out of making a decision. Thus, while decision-making process happens, the same may not translate into actual buying. The information thus gathered may act as a feedback for being utilized later when s/he goes out for buying the next time. Further, the decision-making process may halt owing to some pertinent issue at hand or the buyer failed to make the conclusive decision for some or the other reason. In the context of elections and voting behavior, it has been evidently shown that some voters prefer to gather more intensive knowledge than the others. Thus, they prefer not to vote if the newly-acquired information does not favor their expectations vis-à-vis the contesting political parties. Thus, even in the next elections, they would recall the reasons as to why they did not vote for the contesting political parties and prefer abstaining voting. It is also possible that owing to some untoward circumstance, they could not gather ample information about the political parties and therefore such incomplete information coerced them to abstain voting.

The chief difficulty with this model is that although there are many feedback loops, it presents a linear process of consumer decision-making. This model is linear in the sense that while gathering more information and evaluating alternatives against the desired or expected benchmark, s/he ends up making or abstaining from making a decision to purchase the article. However, it has been acknowledged in the consumer behavior literature that buying decision-making process does not follow a sequential order (Brinber & Lutz, 1986) and there are instances where more than one process happens simultaneously (Phillips & Bradshaw, 1993). In the elections, the same drawbacks might figure out. For instance, it is not mandatory that a voter would look for information on the political parties, set some benchmark indicators on which s/he might evaluate the political parties and then make a final decision as to whether s/he would exercise the decision to vote for a particular political party or not. A second limitation of the model pertains to the assumption that buyers possess the capacity to evaluate the alternatives and make a rational judgment vis-à-vis the best suited alternative. Likewise, it is not essential that voters would be able to make perfectly rational decisions regarding political parties. Lastly, Bray (2008) points out that the model is mechanistic and may not be applicable to myriad decision-making contexts. Further, the environmental and consumer variables impacting the buyers' decision-making have been ignored in the model (Bray, 2008). Similarly, in the elections, the model may be limited in application as the influence of extraneous factors like voter's family background and colleagues and friends is warranted.

### *5.3. Howard and Sheth Model (1969)*

This model is based on the premise that attitudes and intentions influence the decision to buy (Hunt & Pappas, 1972). Further, the model takes into account the marketing as well as social influences which impinge upon a consumer's decision to buy. In the model, there are four components across which information flows, viz., inputs (marketing and social stimuli), perceptual constructs (attention and information search), learning constructs (motives, choice criteria, brand comprehension, leading to an attitude, confidence, intention, and satisfaction), and outputs (purchase, intention, attitude, brand comprehension and attention) (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Besides these four elements, the fifth set of variables relates to the exogenous variables (significance of the purchase, consumer background, reference

groups, personality traits, time available and financial status) (Howard & Sheth, 1969). Likewise, in the case of the elections, the voter gathers information from outside or through his family and friends. Thereafter, s/he processes that information systematically and evaluates the political party in terms of attempting a close match between his/her motives, benchmark and develops a mental map of comprehension, intention and satisfaction with the political party. Finally, the actual decision in the form of voting happens. Among the exogenous variables may be counted the significance of voting a particular political party, his/her background, reference groups, personality traits, time available and economic status. Probably, an individual from an underprivileged family may prefer to vote for a political party which has leanings towards socialism.

This model is quite comprehensive and has been able to include a myriad set of factors. However, the problem lies in that consumers are not habituated to follow the fixed path and therefore the model is quite complex for day-to-day purchases (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979). Likewise, it is possible that the voters may not follow the fixed route for gathering and processing the information. Thus, the model is criticized for being linear.

#### *5.4. McCarthy, Perreault and Quester Model (1997)*

This model is a modified version of the model presented by Engel and his colleagues. In this model, there is a concept of criteria for choice which implies that the task of setting up the criteria is quite different from that of evaluation of alternatives. Therefore, the setting up of criteria is important. Likewise, in the case of voting behavior, the voters select their desired criteria for evaluating the political parties prior to making voting decisions.

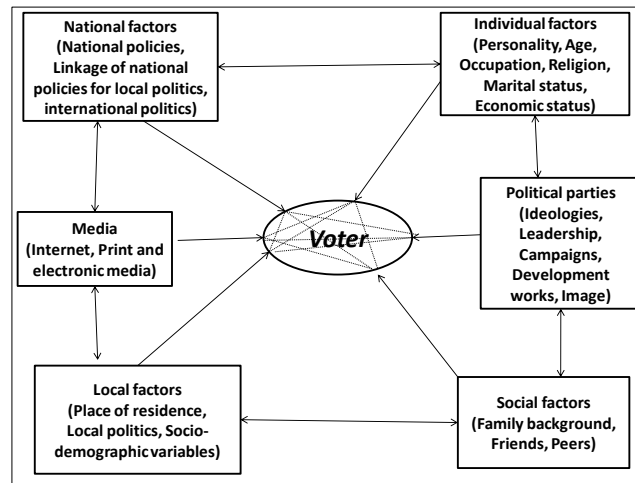
The problem with this model remains that this model is linear in approach. Further, the impact of social and situational variables is not completely appreciated as they are depicted in terms of need-want awareness only. Thus, psychological variables have been ignored in the model.

## 6. Prospective Model

Conceding the fact that none of the aforementioned models are complete in themselves, I propose to advance a model based on the cybernetics theory. Basically, cybernetics aims at understanding and defining the specific functions, processed and interrelationships which exist in a system. Further, the theory focuses on the ways and means how systems use information, models and control actions to steer towards and maintain their goals and at the same they counteract disturbances of various kinds (Heylighen & Joslyn, 2001). Complex processes are explained through systemic analysis. Further, cybernetic studies are helpful in explaining complex systems wherein a large number of mutually interacting and interlinked parts are studied in terms of their interactions (Wirgth, 1979). Furthermore, these interacting elements are responsive to the changes within the system. Thus, when a single element is affected within a system, there will be a simultaneous impact on all other elements of the system (Egea-Kuehne, 2003). The significance of cybernetics lies in the fact that the theory lends an interesting approach in understanding the behavior of complex systems over time. The role of feedback loops is integral to cybernetic studies wherein feedback mechanisms provide corrective suggestions to the systemic entities.

Primarily speaking, a system is defined as “a set of interacting or interdependent entities” which form an integrated whole (Wirgth, 1979). The system is a web of inter-relationships between the different elements or entities. Furthermore, for analyzing the systemic structure, it is important that the irrelevant entities be removed. Thus, the systemic boundary is defined. A system is composed of several entities or elements which constitute the subsystems. These entities interact and interrelate among themselves which, in turn, defines the systemic complexity. The system is so integrated that the subsystems do not operate autonomously.

Figure 1 below demonstrates the theoretical model of voting behavior wherein the interaction among the diverse forces results in a comprehensive system of decision-making as far as voting is concerned.



**Figure 1.** Cybernetic model describing the interaction among and between variables impacting the voter in his/her decision-making.

The figure depicts how various forces impact the voter in his/her decision-making. The inter-linkages between the entities is indicated through the arrow-lines and the inter-linkages between the entities is also shown in the hemisphere where “Voters” is depicted. For want of clarity, solid lines were not drawn. However, interaction pattern remains undisputed between all the entities as also with the voter’s decision-making.

**6.1. Individual factors (Personality, Age, Occupation, Religion, Marital status, Economic status)**

Individual factors which have a bearing on a voter’s decision-making are his/her personality including his/her traits and cognitive-affective-conative dimensions. Cognition is related to the awareness, knowledge or beliefs, affect is linked with an individual's feelings towards an object, which might be favorable, unfavorable or neutral; and conation is linked with behavior as it is related to the intent or action component (Fishbein, 1967; Fishbein & Azjen, 1975). Thus, a voter might exercise his/her voting decision in line with the fact whether s/he is aware of the ideologies of all the political parties prior to making a decision; s/he might have a personal liking for a particular political party owing to some casual reason like the similarity of the sun sign of the political leader with his/her, or a voter might have been influenced by the political party’s development works undertaken in the past and therefore a voter might have preferences for the particular political party.

The Big Five Model of personality envisages that individual personality dimensions are determined by 5 factors like neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1988). Neuroticism is linked with anxiety, hostility, depression, self-consciousness, vulnerability and impulsiveness. Voters might fall into any of these aforesaid categories and such tendencies are liable to impact his/her decision-making. Extraversion is a personality trait in which individuals are social, adventurous, assertive and ambitious. With too many friends and gregariousness, voters are liable to be influenced by their friends and peers. It is possible that a voter who has an introvert personality may prefer to remain uninfluenced by the social group owing to minimal interaction. Conscientiousness is linked with an individual’s degree of self-control, achievement, order and persistence (Costa, McCrae & Dye, 1991). Voters with a high level of conscientiousness are liable to prefer political



parties with a vision and foresight and the desire to implement reforms. Openness to experience is linked with an individual's philosophical and intellectual ability as well as imagination, autonomy and non-conformity. Thus, voters who are high on this personality trait might prefer to opt for political parties which are non-conformists and have a novel stand than the others. Lastly, agreeableness is linked with being cooperative, trusting, caring and being likeable, good-natured, cheerful and gentle. Such personality traits might lend greater happiness and satisfaction with life in general and voters exhibiting this personality trait might exhibit trust in their preferred political party instead of shifting their stand.

Even an individual's mood has an important bearing on his/her voting decision. It is quite possible that if the voter's mood is glum, s/he might prefer to abstain from voting on a particular day. Individuals are more likely to evaluate about any target in a more positive manner when they are in a happy rather than sad mood (Schwarz, 2000). Similarly, individuals in their positive moods are liable to estimate positive outcomes and events rather than those in those in their sad moods. Therefore, it is probable that voters' evaluation of political parties may be influenced by their moods.

Further, an individual's health may influence his/her voting decision. For instance, physical disability might pose problems in decision-making owing to linguistic and cultural barriers (Marchant & Jones, 2003). A physically challenged individual might be interested in looking for a political party which caters to the needs of the physically challenged individuals and has shaped policies for the benefit of such individuals.

Further, aspects like individual motivation and locus of control are included in this facet. Individuals who have intrinsic motivation have more internally valued and regulated behavior and are therefore more autonomous (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Such individuals display behaviors which are aroused out of self-interest and they enjoy activities for their own sake. These individuals are self-determined and their behavior emanates from their sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Thus, voters with intrinsically motivated behaviors might be interested in voting for a political party owing to increased interest in that political party and careful search. Further, those with an internal locus of control might perceive that their voting decision shall be more significant than that which is influenced by the surroundings. Locus of control refers to the perception of an individual regarding the extent to which s/he exercises control over the life events (Rotter, 1960). Thus, for internals, it is posited that such individuals believe that the outcomes of their life events are a result of their own efforts; the externals believe that the life events are out of their control and fate, luck or chance are responsible for the life events. These perceptions impact the behaviors of individuals in a major way. Thus, voters who are internals might evaluate the political parties with greater detail and those who are externals might leave the decision of the government in the hands of fate conceding that government formation is not in their hands.

An individual voter's age is an important parameter. A first-time voter might show greater enthusiasm in voting than the one who has been through the rituals a number of times. Thus, a first-time voter might search for more information about the political parties and come to a decision than the repeated voter. Simultaneously, a repeated voter might use his heuristics to guide him/her in making decision in the forthcoming election.

An individual voter's occupation might have an important bearing on voter's preferences. Those from the blue-collared jobs might be aligned to a trade union which, in turn, might be affiliated with some national political party. Therefore, it would be quite obvious that the voter would vote for the political party which has been supporting his/her trade union. Likewise, a management professional might have access to all information about the political parties and s/he would process information accordingly and make a calculated voting decision.

Furthermore, an individual's religion might have an important bearing on a voter. There are political parties which indulge in playing politics for wooing a

certain segment of people adhering to a particular faith. Further, sometimes, political parties attempt at taking advantage of religious riots and try to woo people belonging to a particular religion. It has been well-documented that religious convictions go a long way in impacting the political preferences of the subjects (Greenwalt, 1988). Thus, covertly or overtly, an individual's religious convictions influence his/her voting style. For instance, there are some political parties which are openly espousing the cause of a particular religion; it is likely that individuals belonging to the same faith will vote for that political party under most, if not all, circumstances.

An individual's marital status is an important indicator of his/her voting decision. Spouses influence voting decisions of an individual. Therefore, there might be some biasness in the decision of the voters. Further, an individual with a large family might be interested in a political party which offers lucrative prospects of scholarship in its manifesto or has introduced significant school or higher education reforms. Further, first-time voters might be very much influenced by the opinions of their family members or veterans.

Finally, an individual's economic status might have an important impact on voting decision. It is probable that a political party has introduced subsidies in the procurement of foodgrains whereas another political party has introduced heavy taxation in the form of taxation on personal income. Thus, the voter will be influenced accordingly. Further, an affluent family hailing from an entrepreneurial background might be interested in voting for a particular political party which has introduced sops for businessmen in the past or introduced policies favoring the stock markets. Similarly, an agriculturist might be interested in voting for a political party which has been conducive in improving the living standard of the farmers in terms of providing them higher prices for purchase of foodgrains or providing cheap rates of interest from the financial institutions or providing free education to their children.

### *6.2. Political parties (Ideologies, Leadership, Campaigns, Development works, Image)*

Impact of ideologies on the voters has been noticed (Jost, Nosek & Gosling, 2008). Political parties who have been winning elections in the past and have come to power may be compared with those which are recent ones in the fray in terms of their ideologies, leadership, campaigning, development works and image. For instance, a voter may be comfortable in voting for a political party which has communist leanings than the one which has rightist stance. Similarly, a political party might be favoring radical reforms and hence might not be preferred. Likewise, political parties with separatist ideas might be favored by some but not by the others. Political parties aiming to woo a particular section of the society at the cost of others might be viewed differently across the length and breadth of the electorate.

Secondly, the leadership of the political party is very significant. Political parties with leaders tainted in corruption or scams are discarded to the ones with a clean image. Candidates with scars of corruption charges are likely to suffer from loss of vote share or be completely outvoted (Fackler & Lin, 1995; Peters & Welch, 1980). Further, voters are interested in the personal lives of the leaders and therefore prefer those political parties where the leaders are far-sighted and decisive and have not indulged in scandalous activities. Even the family background of the political leaders is taken into consideration set when the voter decides to vote. Political leaders mired in controversies are not favored. Thus, private scandals in the lives of the political leaders might impact the voters to some extent (Kagay, 1999; Zaller, 1998).

It has been found that voters are influenced to such a great extent by the election campaigns that some of them change their preferences during the course of campaigning or after the campaigns are over (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Hillygus & Jackman, 2003). Further, even the campaign spending and television

advertising has been found to be impacting voting decision (Franklin, 1991). Further, the pitch of the campaigns by the political parties matters a lot. The campaigns of the political parties prior to the elections are as much significant as their political speeches round the year. Controversial statements made by the political parties in their manifestoes or empty promises are being scoffed at and voters make their decisions accordingly. Furthermore, the reach of the political campaigns matters a lot.

Furthermore, development works undertaken by the political parties is a significant metric of assessing the political parties. The incumbent political party is judged in line with the development works undertaken by the political party. For instance, the incumbent political party might have launched programmes for improving the infrastructure of the airports or catered to the development of green economy. These development works impact the psyche of the voter. Similarly, another rival political party might be holding out promises for better reforms in the area of sports infrastructure in the country and a voter who hails from sports background and has been a sports professional for long might prefer to vote for that political party even if the political party fails on several other counts.

Finally, a political party's image is the decider of its being voted or routed in the elections. Image refers to an individual's subjective understanding of things in the sense that an individual defines what are his/her beliefs about something or his/her dislikes and likes and what are his/her reactions or preferences in response to these beliefs (Boulding, 1956). In the context of marketing management, brand image is defined in terms of the feelings and beliefs aroused as a result of a particular brand's performance and a consumer's experience (Kotler, 1975). It may be conceded that given that political marketing as a domain within the broader discipline of political science has been emphatic upon treating political parties as brands (Wrings, 1997). Thus, voters, akin to consumers, would prefer the political brand which is closest to their perceptions and self-belief. Thus, the voter would attempt to seek congruence between his/her perceived self-image with that of the political party which s/he prefers. Image of a political party is a function of its leaders' image and reputation as well as its goodwill in terms of the dependability and reliability. Thus, a political party which has failed in curbing riots in the recent past might be voted out of power if the voters prefer an alternative political party with more clarity of vision and decisiveness. Similarly, a political party which has been involved in creating furor in the legislature might be viewed with negative perspective. Likewise, a political party which has been acting in a very dictatorial manner might be disliked by the voter. For instance, a bureaucrat who has been serving a particular political party might be disinclined to vote for the same political party if s/he is dissatisfied with the way s/he is treated by the minister concerned of that political party. Similarly, a bartender who has been happy with the tips received from a minister might be willing to vote for the same political party to which the minister belongs. Thus, image of the political party is viewed from the perspective of the voter and the one which is publicly displayed by the political party itself.

### *6.3. Social factors (Family background, Friends, Peers)*

Among the social factors which impact a voter in his/her decision-making, mention may be made of the family background of the voter. As derived from the model of consumer socialization, it may be hypothesized that owing to the frequency of contact, primacy and control over rewards and punishments given to the individual, an individual gets influenced to a substantial degree. Thus, family members or peers might have significant influence on the voters (Moschis & Moore, 1979). It has been found that informal social networks impact voting decisions because voting leads to social approval (Abrams, Iversen & Soskice, 2010).

It has been estimated that affluent individuals lay more emphasis upon the overall financial strength of the country while making their voting decision owing

to their being able to afford luxury, however, the socio-economic status decreases the propensity to compare the larger picture declines and the voter is prompted to base his/her voting decision based on his/her poor economic status (Weatherford, 1983; Welch & Hibbing, 1992). Further, the sex of the voter has been found to be influential in impacting his/her voting decision. Thus, women are likely to favor those political parties who have formulated policies favoring the elderly, sick or economically poor rather than those who have been involved in waging war or violence (Welch & Hibbing, 1992).

Further, a voter might be influenced by his family which has been a loyalist to a particular political party for years together. Similarly, a political party might be favored by a voter if the family itself or distant relative is a representative of the political party. A person's social standing is also an important factor as far as influencing a voter is concerned. For instance, a voter hailing from the same religion as that of the chief representative of a particular political party might prefer to vote for that particular political party given that the voter might anticipate beneficial relationship with the representative in the long-run. Similarly, if the elections are approaching and a political party has been instrumental in causing uproar in the community to which an individual voter belongs, that political party would be discarded by the voter. For instance, if a family member has been killed in a road accident where the vehicle was that of a political party leader, it is nearly certain that the near ones of that family will not vote for that political party or if that leader is one of the contestants in the impending polls, s/he is done for.

Social groups leave a lasting effect on the minds of a voter. It is probable that friends and colleagues might influence the individual voter to a great extent. As a part of the reference group, the individual voter might get carried away with the advice or general discussions among the friends and peers. Such discussions might have a lasting impact on the individual voter, however, rational s/he might be. Further, empathy works. In case, a friend or peer provides valid grounds on the basis of which s/he was disturbed or exhilarated, the individual voter might get influenced to a great deal. This might be true in professional circles where discussions might veer around politics or among first-time voters who might discuss politics in great detail.

#### *6.4. Local factors (Place of residence, Local politics, Socio-demographic variables)*

An individual voter's place of residence impacts the decision to vote for a particular political party. For instance, the individual voter might be influenced by the cleanliness or greenery of the surrounding area. If s/he is dissatisfied with the municipal works of the area, there might be an aversion for the political party of which the councilor is a representative of.

Similarly, the local politics of the region might have an important influence on the voter. It is possible that despite some street brawl reaching its peak, the local police officials have been ineffective and the individual voter is displeased over the bureaucratic transfers of police officials or bureaucrats. The nature and scope of ties between the local councilor and the regional political leader might be evaluated by the individual voter as a significant benchmark for basing his/her decision. Thus, if the state elections are impending and the individual voter had voted for a particular political party, it is quite probable that in the state elections, the same voter might vote for a different political party given his/her satisfaction with the politics of his/her place. It is common to note that the local councilors are accessible only during the elections while they are out for campaigning during the elections; the individual voter might keep a note of this aspect and prefer to change sides if s/he perceives that the political leaders are opportunistic and attempting to win the loyalty of the voters only temporarily.

Finally, the socio-demographic variables have a significant bearing on an individual voter. There might be instances where the general populace of the local area might be influenced by a political party more than the rest. Thus, it might be a

decided by the veterans that only the veteran politicians are seasoned and capable of making far-sighted policies. Thus, they would influence their families to vote for political parties where veterans have stood as contestants. Further, the community in which an individual voter resides might have a direct impact on his/her psyche. Thus, if the entire community of the local area belongs to traders and it is anticipated that a particular political party shall be supporting a local trader as the political contestant, the individual voter might get carried away in his/her decision-making. The median age of the voters has an impact in so far as the tilt for youth leaders might be favored or disfavored. Thus, while some voters might have a preference for young political leaders as change agents, there might be others who might prefer middle-aged political leaders with a right proportion of sagacity and experience. The economic status or the living condition of the people residing in the locality might impact the individual voter in so far as the latter might be favoring a particular political party which has a professed agenda towards instituting a socialist society. Similarly, the educational qualifications of the people residing in a locality might influence a voter through his/her inputs. It is possible that a housemaid might pour in her agony of her children who have not been able to study as a result of negligible or no scholarship assistance from the municipal school authorities. Thus, the individual voter has a chance of being influenced by the distressful situation of the housemaid and therefore this might result in a change of preference.

### *6.5. Media (Internet, Print and electronic media)*

Internet has been influencing the psyche of the voters in an immense manner (Tolbert & McNeal, 2001). First off, the processing of information gathered from internet influenced the decision-making process of a voter. There is humungous information available on the internet which pertains to the politics of the day. Such information provides regular cues to the individual voter regarding his/her preference and attitude-building regarding a particular political party. At the same time, it may also be hypothesized that areas where internet connectivity is absent; voters might remain deprived of information to process adequately and therefore, their decisions might be based on incomplete information. For instance, it was reported that those with accessibility to internet indulged in conducting preliminary search about the political parties and their offices besides contacting the political candidates (Bimber, 2001). Political parties have their separate websites and voters have ample opportunity to compare and contrast the different political parties.

The ability to communicate through the internet is also fortified as social networking sites discuss political issues to a great deal. Thus, social networking sites are a platform where the influence on the individual voter increases in a manifold way owing to debates and discussion. Further, quite a large number of political party leaders have social networking accounts and they share their opinion. Some of these have their personal web-pages or blogs. Their views are taken with immense seriousness and individual voters comment or share their views on the statements released by the political leaders. Sometimes, controversial statements are released by the political party leaders and individual voters feel grossly offended. At the same time, the political party leaders make statements which are favorable to the local, regional or national politics and these statements might be perceived in a favorable light by the individual voters. Thus, these statements influence the psyche of the individual voter. It has been suggested that the more actively people use social networking sites to engage in elections, it is likelier that their voting decision would be impacted by the information exchanged through these social networking websites (Owen, 2011).

Further, print as well as electronic media has a significant impact on the minds of the individual voters. All the happenings of the day are shared through print media as well as the electronic media. Newspapers carry weighty editorials on the politics of the day and their headlines enrapture the readers to a great extent. Besides debating on the significant political issues of the day, the debates by

political experts, academia as well as the general readers gives ample forum for the detailed analysis of these issues. Such a threadbare analysis and viewpoint impacts the individual voter majorly. Live talks with the political leaders on TV impacts the individual voter in decision-formation process. Even the radio channels impact the voters in a significant manner. Further, there are newspapers dedicated to discussion and debate on the political news and events. Similarly, there are TV channels which are dedicated to the discussion around politics in exclusivity. All the minor and major political events are blown out of proportion or passed under the carpet contingent upon the media's preferences. The voter has limited information in this sense because s/he does not come to know about those major and minor events which have been shoved away. Thus, despite being informed in one sense of the term, the voter remains at the mercy of the media representation. There are some media channels which are adherents of yellow journalism and therefore they provide incomplete information to the readers, listeners or viewers. Further, sting journalism has emerged in a major way wherein the journalists unravel secret stories about the politicians. Such stories are very catchy and impact the individual voter in a major way.

### *6.6. National factors (National policies, Linkage of national policies for local politics, international politics)*

Among the national factors which might have a bearing on the individual voter's decision-making process are the national policies which are made in the areas of economic planning, social development and infrastructure planning. Policies formulated in the areas of economy as well as social issues like social welfare, civil rights, business and so on (Abramowitz, 1995; Alvarez & Nagler, 1998; Brooks, 2006). Thus, it is clearly seen that voters are glued to the media for ascertaining the national policies formulated for ameliorating the condition of the underprivileged or the ones for the economic planning or infrastructure reforms. Budget, released by the political party of the day, influences the individual voter in a major way as the major changes vis-à-vis the economic structure of the country are laid down therein. Thus, taxation reforms are viewed with deep interest for they impact the voter's savings and income which would further have an impact on the standard of living. Similarly, significant changes involving the levy or abandon of taxes and tolls are weighed appropriately. New schemes launched by the government of the day might be appreciated by the individual voter or viewed with suspicion. The voter makes instant comparison of the schemes launched by the incumbent government with those launched by the previous government.

Further, the voter is quick to grasp the linkage between the national policies with local politics. Thus, the chief aim of a voter is maximization of his/her goals and for the achievement of these goals; a voter tries to find out the costs and benefits associated vis-à-vis alignment with the political party. When the local political party is different from the one in the Centre, it is quite possible that divergence of policies happens. This is especially true of federal governments where the States do not have the desired autonomy and the overarching policies are those dictated by the Centre. Thus, in this case, the States are dependent upon the Centre for resources and they are bound to follow the strictures received by the Centre. A voter would make a comparison between the policies which are made at the Centre and keep a watch on the implementation of the policies. Should the voters perceive that the local politicians are not utilizing the funds received from the Centre or they are indulging in embezzlement of these funds, it is probable that the voters might opt for preferring a change in their voting preferences. Further, the voter bears in mind that there are cases where pork barrel politics happens in such a way that the legislators bargain for more funds for their own constituency but all the areas of the constituency are not benefitted from these funds. Voters might perceive such an impartial treatment as a bruise on their voting decision and hence they might opt for a change of the local legislator to the one hailing from a different political party.

Finally, the ruling party's approach to international politics has a significant bearing on the individual voter. In many cases, international policy decisions are made keeping in mind the domestic political conditions such as leader's popularity and elections' proximity (Meernik, 1994:124; Putnam, 1988). There have been many cases where the major international changes impact the country and in such cases the policy responses of the ruling party matter a lot. Even the visit of an international political leader is analyzed through the voters' lens wherein s/he appreciates whether the statements released by the visitor are conducive to the national interest or not. Further, the diplomatic moves are analyzed carefully. For instance, international agreements signed with the ministers from other countries regarding assistance in developing information technology infrastructure might be perceived in a favorable light by the voter if the same are signed in favor of his/her own state or area. Similarly, the ruling party's response to a major war with another country might be perceived in a negative light if the ruling party has failed to provide requisite support for the displaced. For instance, it has been estimated that vote share would have been more in the 2004 US Presidential Elections if Iraq War would have been avoided (Karol & Miguel, 2007). Likewise, international economy might impact the national economy to a great deal. Financial crisis is known to impact voters because voters' information may be broad-based on this count (Keefer, 2007). Voters might be interested in perceiving such upheavals with a close perspective. Thus, it is quite possible that their living standards are impacted owing to the changes in the international economy and the ruling party has not been able to respond favorably to the changes.

### 7. Conclusion

As evident from the aforesaid model, voting is a very complex process with a myriad set of factors impinging upon the voter's decision-making process. The model appears to be holistic and following a cybernetics approach, the model sketched the diverse forces impacting a voter with inter-linkages between these forces. The model was derived after the ascertainment of the fact the existing models and theoretical frameworks do not explain the voting behavior phenomenon in a substantial manner. The key actors involved in the model are the voter, reference groups, family, friends and peers and political party leaders. The model is built upon assumptions and requires empirical testing and validation. Further, research questions may be drawn from the model linking political marketing domain as to how are political parties influencing voters through branding and marketing. A second line of approach emerges from an economics perspective where the rational choice theory may be tested against the variables described in the model. As the model captures the behavioral dimension, therefore, management scholars might be interested in probing the impact of behavioral dimensions like locus of control or satisfaction with the voting process. Finally, like the outlining of a consumer socialization model, it is anticipated that future research might probe into the voter socialization modeling.

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