

## **Voter Choice: A Study of Decision Confidence and Satisfaction**

Aron O’Cass and Debbie Grace, Griffith University,  
Rajan Nataraajan, Auburn University

### **Abstract**

Understanding the dynamics of voter behaviour has been an area of interest to consumer researchers and marketers for sometime. This study focuses on specific issues related to voter behaviour via a study of voters in an Australia State election. Data were gathered from 159 voters using a survey administered using a drop off and pick-up. The results indicate that voter concern and involvement play a significant role in voter confidence and their desire to keep up to date during elections.

### **Introduction to Voter Behaviour Theory**

Significant interest in voter choice can be found in research related to voter involvement and attitudes toward political advertising by researchers such as Burton and Netemeyer (1993), Faber, Tims, and Schmitt (1993) and Rothschild (1978), among others. However, little work has been undertaken to examine voter concern, involvement, confidence, and voters’ desire to keep up to date during elections and satisfaction. This study explores the dynamics of voter behaviour during a specific election by examining voter concern, voter involvement, decision-making confidence, desire to keep up to date during elections and satisfaction.

Voter behaviour has been an area of interest to consumer researchers for many years (e.g., Faber, Tims and Schmitt, 1993; Hill, 1989; Newman and Sheth, 1985; Rothschild, 1978; Weaver Larscicy and Tinkham, 1999). Such research has often sought to understand the variance in voter behaviour that can be attributed to different voter characteristics, as well as voter decision criteria used to make choices (see Newman and Sheth, 1984) and the effect of different appeals in political advertising (e.g., Faber, Tims, and Schmitt, 1993; Hill, 1989; Weaver Larscicy and Tinkham, 1999). In this broad area of decision-making, consumer involvement has been recognized as an important influence on consumer decision-making (O’Cass 2000a). During the past decade or so, there have been many theoretical propositions regarding involvement and a wide variety of involvement types and effects (Mittal, 1989; Muehling, Laczniak and Andrews, 1993; Pinkleton, 1998; Rothschild and Houston, 1979). Political advertising researchers have recognized the value of understanding voter involvement in elections (e.g., Burton and Netemeyer, 1992; Faber, Tims and Schmitt, 1993; Rothschild and Houston 1979), because of its effect on search and advertising effectiveness.

An important issue addressed periodically in the literature are the potential antecedents to voter involvement. In the broader literature, identified antecedents such as perceived risk, have been identified, however, an important issue raised in recent times has been that of consumer concern. For example, Bang, Ellinger, Hadjimarcou and Traichal (2000) highlighted the growing concern of consumers over environmental issues related to the earth’s resources. They examined issues related to consumer concern, consumer knowledge and the theory of reasoned action. However, in the context of voting a neglected area is the degree of consumer concern about political issues, including social and economic. Using a similar notion to Bang et al (2000) and that of Zaichkowsky (1985) it is argued that when issues in an election or broader economic and social concerns are raised in voters they will become more

involved. As such we see voter concern directly influencing voter involvement and it is hypothesised that

**H1: Voter concern will significantly influence voter involvement.**

Related to involvement is search for information related to choice as a major element of consumer behaviour theory. There have been indicators that consumers, in general, seek little pre-purchase information (Beatty and Smith 1987). Information search, or seeking in the context of electoral choice, is defined as information seeking which voters engage in to facilitate decision-making in an election. In the context of commercial goods, it has been shown by Beatty and Smith (1987) and Bloch and Richins (1983), that involvement in a purchase is related strongly to external search by consumers. Overall, there appears to be some support for the view that consumers' (or voters') involvement will affect on the extent of information search. Although the empirical support is weak, the logical connection can be seen, in the work of Houston and Rothschild (1978), who fundamentally viewed intensity of search as simply one form of response involvement. Although not specifically defined in the literature, we may view extent of search as a desire to be informed or keep up to date. This is particularly relevant in the voter choice context if we consider the varied information sources available to voters to access information during campaigns and the significant volume of communications that occurs during an election. Considering the arguments of both Beatty and Smith (1987) and Bloch and Richins (1983), we expect that those more involved in politics will possess a greater desire to keep informed during an election, and as such, it is hypothesized that

**H2: Voter involvement will influence the desire to keep up to date during elections.**

Previous voter research has also shown different effects depending on level of involvement; for example, research by Burton and Netemeyer (1992) examined the effects of situational and enduring involvement on voters' response involvement, knowledge, confidence, and preference stability. Their findings indicate significant effects for involvement on voter knowledge, confidence, and preference stability. The degree of confidence a voter has regarding his or her views or decision making abilities to do with an election is important because it can affect the strength of the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. Confidence represents a consumer's belief that his or her attitude, knowledge, or ability is sufficient or correct regarding a product (or object/stimuli). The degree of confidence could reflect certainty or uncertainty, as to which judgment is correct or the best, or even ambiguity, as to the meaning of an attitude object (O'Cass, 2000b) in the context of voting. As such, it is hypothesized that

**H3: Voter involvement will significantly influence confidence in making an electoral choice.**

**H4: Voter desire to keep up to date during elections will influence confidence in decision-making.**

In the context of politics, satisfaction generally arises from a voter's comparison of the perceived political performance with expectations for this performance. Satisfaction is indicated if performance meets or exceeds expectations. There is a growing body of consumer satisfaction research related to commercial goods and services; however, little if any has examined voter satisfaction. One impetus for examining the effects of voter involvement on satisfaction is Day's (1977) observation that satisfaction decisions are contingent on the incidence of post purchase evaluation. For stimuli of low importance, evaluations might not be triggered and Barber and Venkatraman (1986) argue that satisfaction

becomes an even more important issue for a high involvement product. This implies that, when a person is involved in the object, satisfaction is triggered and avoidance of dissatisfaction is important. This is supported by Richins and Bloch (1991) who argue that, because a product is an important part of a consumer's life, highly involved consumers have stronger motivation to avoid post purchase dissatisfaction. They have more at stake in the purchase situation and a greater need to make a wise choice, and it is believed that voters who are highly involved in politics will also seek to avoid dissatisfaction. As such, it is hypothesized that

**H5: Voter involvement will significantly influence voter satisfaction.**

**H6: Voter confidence will significantly influence voter satisfaction.**

**H7: Desire to keep informed during an election will significantly influence voter satisfaction.**

## **Research Design**

The study was based on the design and administration of a self-completed questionnaire that was part of a larger study of voter behaviour, administered to a convenience sample of voters in a state election. The data were gathered immediately after the election, and the respondents were all registered to vote, and did cast a vote on polling day. A drop-off and pick-up approach was used, yielding 159 surveys, with respondent's ages ranging between 18 and 79 years, with an average age of 32 years. The sample was evenly split between men and women and 20% of respondents had a junior high school education, 30% senior high school, 42% an undergraduate university degree, and 8% a postgraduate qualification.

Data were gathered on voter involvement in politics, adapted from O'Cass (2000a). The seven-item scale measured the degree of what might be termed "product involvement" in a conventional sense. The scale is oriented toward measuring the position (centrality) that politics occupies in a person's life (O'Cass, 2000a). Therefore, it measures voter involvement using items such as politics is a significant part of my life and politics means a lot to me. Voter confidence was measured via a 3-item scale adapted from O'Cass (1999), that measures the voter's confidence in making his or her choice in the election with items such as I have confidence in my ability to make a good decision on who to vote for. Scales to measure voters' desire to keep informed were developed for this study on the basis of work by Beatty and Smith (1987) and Mittal (1989). The items capture the extent that the individual is motivated or desires to keep up to date during the election via gathering information. Voter concern was measured using four items adapted from Bang et al (2000). Political satisfaction (general level with parties, politics etc) was measured via a four-item scale measuring satisfaction with political parties and politics in general and candidate satisfaction and party satisfaction. Responses to items were measured using seven-point scales with endpoints "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The process adopted used a panel of expert judges (active consumer behaviour researchers) and a series of focus groups for assessment of content and face validity and survey refinement (O'Cass, 2000a; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Because of the nature of elections, this process was considered the most appropriate to test and validate the scales and keep the surveys as short as possible to aid completions. Also, because the scales had been used and validated in prior research, pilot testing the instrument on a larger sample was considered not critical. Because all scales were sourced from existing literature and validated in the pre-test, they were considered to possess content and face validity (O'Cass, 2001).

## Results

Initially the factor structures of the measures were examined for dimensionality using principle components with oblique rotation, followed by reliability estimates. The analysis of the scales showed that all the factor loadings were  $>.6$ , all loadings were found to be statistically significant at  $p < .05$ , and no cross-loadings greater than  $.4$  were identified in the factor analysis. Finally, all construct reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) were greater than  $.85$ . Subsequently, all items were computed into composite variables to test the models. To assess the discriminant validity of the constructs, the suggestions of Gaski (1984) were followed. Gaski (1984) argues that if the correlation between two composite constructs is not higher than their respective reliability estimate, discriminant validity exists. The results indicated that, using this criterion all reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha) were greater than their correlation. Thus, the measurement development and testing indicated that all measures possess acceptable content, discriminant validity and reliability.

Partial least squares (PLS) were used to analyse the data. PLS is a general technique for estimating path models involving latent constructs indirectly observed by multiple indicators (Fornell and Cha, 1994), such as those developed in this study and when sample sizes are small. A systematic examination of various fit indices for predictive relevance of the model was undertaken, including average variance accounted (AVA),  $R^2$  and regression weights. These indices provide evidence for the existence of the relationships rather than definitive statistical tests, which may be contrary to the philosophy of soft modeling as outlined by Falk and Miller (1992). The results for the inner model, which focuses on the relationships among voter involvement, confidence, desire to keep up to date, and value of information sources, are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 Partial Least Squares Results for the Theoretical Model**

Predicted Variables	Predictor Variables	Hyps	Path	Variance Due to Path	$R^2$	Critical Ratio
Voter involvement	Voter concern	H1	.362	.13	.13	4.07
Keep up to date	Voter involvement	H2	.680	.46	.46	14.65
Voter confidence	Voter involvement	H3	.345	.19	.35	3.30
	Keep up to date	H4	.297	.16		2.63
Voter satisfaction	Voter involvement	H5	.137	.05	.20	1.50
	Voter confidence	H6	.159	.06		1.55
	Keep up to date	H7	.224	.09		2.16
AVA					.29	

The AVA for the endogenous variables was  $.29$  and the individual  $R^2$ 's were greater than the recommended  $.10$  for all the predicted variables and the standard errors for the variables were small. Because the majority of the  $R^2$  estimates were larger than the recommended levels, it is appropriate and informative to examine the significance of the paths associated with these variables. A reasonable criterion for evaluating the significance of the individual paths is the absolute value of the product of the path coefficient and the appropriate correlation coefficient (Falk and Miller, 1992, p.74). Because paths are estimates of the standardized regression weights, this produces an index of the variance in an endogenous variable explained by that particular path, and  $1.5\%$  ( $.015$ ) of the variance is recommended as the cut-off point. In Table 2, all the paths exceed

this criterion, and the bootstrap critical ratios are of the appropriate size (greater than 1.96,  $p < .05$ ) (except for H5, H6) and therefore, given the sizes of the  $R^2$ , and variance due to individual paths H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6 and H7 are supported.

## **Discussion**

Voter choice is increasingly being analysed to provide interested groups a better understanding of voters and their choices and to explain and predict voting behaviour and communication effects. Political parties and their candidates want to know how to allocate their resources during campaigns and develop better knowledge about how and why voters make the choices they do, which would enable campaign strategists to target messages and mediums more effectively. Campaign organizations, in this era of market segmentation, targeting, and extensive promotion, need this knowledge to enhance their electoral chances and use their resources better (O’Cass, 1996). This study has shown that, voter involvement was related strongly to voter concern. Also voter involvement was shown to influence a voters desire to keep up to date during the election campaign. Also, confidence in making electoral choices was effected by involvement and keeping up to date. However, satisfaction was influenced by desire to keep up to date and not by involvement and confidence as expected.

This study though it makes significant contributions to our understanding of voter choice, it suffers from many of the limitations found in research of this type. A limitation of the study is the use of some scales that have not been used previously in a political context. Although the scales have been validated in commercial product contexts, further work needs to be done in the context of voter behaviour and political advertising. Also, there is a need to test these scales in a broader nomological network. It would also be informative to study the constructs in a longitudinal study to plot changes in, for example, the level of involvement, confidence of voters, and satisfaction. These limitations do not render the significance of the findings any less important, but instead signal the need for more research to be conducted in this growing and important area of voter behaviour. The actual state election campaign offered an ideal situation to study electoral behaviour and voter search behaviour. However, by its very nature (real life), the study’s ability to identify and separate the effects of other extraneous events and issues was impaired, and therefore, we cannot conclusively establish causation.

Politics is a controversial area in which marketing is applied. The potential for manipulation of the voter by politicians or special interest groups is ever present. However, voter behaviour studies offer the promise of a deeper understanding of voter needs and the development of improved service delivery and satisfaction. In a democratic society, the choice exercised by the voter affects the fate of that society, which itself, underscores the importance of the political process in a society. The fact that certain societies make voting mandatory (e.g., Australia) is but a manifestation of this realization. It follows therefore that it is imperative that those in politics clearly understand the needs, wants and the psyche’ of the voter. Voter behaviour studies in the realm of political marketing, such as this one, aid in acquiring this understanding, which can result in better communications. “While the tools of marketing are increasingly being used because they help win elections, the spirit of marketing has been slow to catch on with politicians.” So, whereas the potential for misuse of marketing research findings by unscrupulous politicians or special interest groups is always there, it is hoped that the findings of voter behaviour studies will be used in the spirit in which they are carried out in the first place. That is to explore and aid in understanding the dynamics of the electoral marketplace.

## References

- Barber, M. B., and Venkatraman, M., 1986. The Determinants of Satisfaction for a High Involvement Product: Three Rival Hypotheses and Their Implications in the Health Care Context. *Advances in Consumer Research*. 13, 316-320.
- Beatty, S., and Smith, S., 1987. External Search Effort: An Investigation Across Several Product Categories. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 14, 83-95.
- Beltramini, R., 1982. Advertising Perceived Believability Scale. In Corrigan, D., Kraft, F., and Ross, R., (Eds.). *Proceedings of the Southwestern Marketing Association*, Wichita State University, Wichita, KS. 1-3.
- Bloch, P., and Richins, M., 1983. A Theoretical Model for the Study of Product Importance Perceptions. *Journal of Marketing*. 47, 69-81.
- Burton, S., and Netemeyer, R., 1992. The Effect of Enduring, Situational, and Response Involvement on Preference Stability in the Context of Voting Behaviour. *Psychology and Marketing*. 9 (2), 143-156.
- Chin, W., 1998a. Issues and Opinion on Structural Equation Modeling. *MIS Quarterly*. 22(1), vii – xvi.
- Chin, W., 1998b. The Partial Least Squares Approach For Structural Equation Modeling. In Marcoulides, G. (Ed.). *Modern Methods for Business Research*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 295-336.
- Converse, J., and Presser, S., 1986). Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardised Questionnaire,” Sage University Paper Series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Day, R., 1977. Toward a Process Model of Consumer Satisfaction. In Hunt, K. (ed.) *Conceptualization and Measurement of Consumer Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction*. , Cambridge MA: Marketing Science Institute, 153-183.
- Evrard, Y., and Aurier, P., 1996. Identification and Validation of the Components of the Person-Object Relationship. *Journal of Business Research*. 37, 127-134.
- Faber, R., Tims, A., and Schmitt, K., 1993. Negative Political Advertising and Voting Intent: The Role of Involvement and Alternative Information Sources. *Journal of Advertising*. 22 (4), 67-76.
- Falk, R. F., and Miller, N.B., 1992. *A Primer for Soft Modeling*. Akron. OH: University of Akron Press.
- Fornell, C., and Cha, J., 1994. Partial Least Squares. *Advanced Methods of Marketing Research*. In Bagozzi, R.P (Ed.). Oxford; Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Gaski, J., 1984. The Theory of Power and Conflict in Channels of Distribution. *Journal of Marketing*. 48 (Summer), 9-29.

- Hayes, B., and McAllister, I., 1996. Marketing Politics to Voters: late Deciders in the 1992 British election. *European Journal of Marketing*.30 (10/11), 135-146.
- Hill, R., 1989. An Exploration of Voter Response to Political Advertisements. *Journal of Advertising*. 18 (4), 14-22.
- Houston, M., and Rothschild, M., 1978. Conceptual and Methodological Perspectives in Involvement. In Jain, S (Ed.). *Research Frontiers in Marketing: Dialogues and Directions*. American Marketing Association. 184-187.
- Kim, C., 1991. Testing The Independence of Cognitive and Affective Involvement. *Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Science*. Fort Lauderdale FL: Academy of Marketing Science. 71-75.
- Lohmöeller, J., 1989. *Latent Variable Modelling With Partial Least Squares*: Heidelberg, Physica-Verlag.
- Mehrabian, A., and Russell., 1974. *An Approach to Environmental Psychology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Mittal, B., 1989. Must Consumer Involvement Always Imply More Information Search? *Advances in Consumer Research*. 16, 167-172.
- Mooradian, T., and Olver, J., 1997. I Can't Get No Satisfaction: The Impact of Personality and Emotion on Postpurchase Process. *Psychology and Marketing*. 14(4), 379-393.
- Muehling, D., Laczniak, R., and Andrews, C., 1993. Defining, Operationalizing, and Using Involvement in Advertising Research: A Review. *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*. 15 (1) (Spring), 21-57.
- Newman, B., 1985. An Historical Review of the Voter as a Consumer. In Tan, C., and Sheth, J., (Eds.). *Proceedings of the Association For Consumer Research International meeting in Singapore, July*, 257-261.
- Newman, B., and Sheth, J., 1987. *A Theory of Political Choice Behaviour*: New York: Praeger.
- O'Cass, A., 1996. Political marketing and the marketing concept. *European Journal of Marketing*. 30 (10/11), 45-61.
- O'Cass, A., 1999. Exploring Purchase Decision Involvement's Influence on Product knowledge and Confidence. *Proceedings of the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy*, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 1-8.
- O'Cass, A., 2000a. An Assessment of Consumers Product, Purchase Decision, Advertising and Consumption Involvement in Fashion Clothing. *Journal of Economic Psychology*. 21, 45-576.
- O'Cass, A., 2000b. A psychometric Evaluation of a Revised Version of the Lennox and Wolfe Revised Self-Monitoring Scale. *Psychology and Marketing*. 17(5), 397-419.

- O'Cass, A., 2001. The Internal-External Marketing Orientation of a Political Party: Social Implications of Political Party Marketing Orientation. *Journal of Public Affairs*. 1 (2), 136-152.
- O'Cass, A., 2001. Consumer Self-Monitoring, Materialism and Involvement in Fashion Clothing. *Australasian Marketing Journal*. 9, 1, 46-60.
- Pinkleton, B., 1997. The Effects of Negative Comparative Political Advertising on Candidate Evaluations and Advertising Evaluations: An Exploration. *Journal of Advertising*. 26 (1), 20-29.
- Pinkleton, B., 1998. Effects of Print Comparative Political Advertising on Political Decision-Making and Participation. *Journal of Communication*. Autumn, 24-36.
- Richins, M., and Bloch, P., 1991. Post-Purchase Product Satisfaction: Incorporating the effects of Involvement and Time. *Journal of Business Research*. 23, 145-158.
- Rothschild, M., 1978. Political Advertising: A Neglected Policy Issue in Marketing. *Journal of Marketing Research*. 15, 58-71.
- Rothschild, M., and Houston, M., 1979. Individual Differences in Voting Behaviour: Further Investigations of Involvement. In Olson, J, (Ed.). *Advances in Consumer Research*. 7, Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Consumer Research. 655-658.
- Sonner, B., 1998. The Effectiveness of Negative Political Advertising: A Case Study. *Journal of Advertising Research* (November-December), 37-42.
- Vaughn, R., 1980. How Advertising Works: A Planning Model. *Journal of Advertising*. 20, 27-33.
- Weaver Lariscy, R., and Tinkham, S., 1999. The Sleeper Effect and Negative Political Advertising. *Journal of Advertising*. 28 (4), 13-30.
- Zaichkowsky, J., 1985. Measuring the Involvement Construct. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 12 (3), 341-352.