ABSTRACT

There is little empirical research on the voting behaviour among voters in the lowest socio-economic strata, which is commonly referred to as the bottom of the pyramid (BOP) segment, despite their significant share in the world population (approximately 65 percentage) and vast potential as future consumers. The huge size of the BOP population plays an important role in electing candidates to office; however, little is known about their political behaviour. The purpose of this study is to understand the factors driving the BOP community's voting behaviour and how these factors affect the voting behaviour of BOP communities.

This study adopted a mixed-method approach employing qualitative and quantitative methods. Study 1 adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach for conducting 32 interviews with BOP voters in two areas: Kolkata and Kharagpur, in West Bengal, India. The findings showed that some political parties and politicians powerfully operate in BOP areas and dominate BOP people through persuasion, benefits and coercion. Hence, BOP people in those areas vote for them. The people at the bottom of the economic pyramid (BOP) are a close-knit community with a strong social network adhering to the community's social codes, values, and decisions. Being the most vulnerable segment in society, BOP communities strongly need social capital and representation in society. Social capital and social identity and representation resulting from the sense of belongingness with local politicians also drive their voting behaviour.

Study 2 adopts a quantitative approach using Structural Equation Modelling to examine BOP consumers' voting behaviour empirically. This study forwards a holistic model explaining how social constructionism (need for social capital and representation) leads to

voting behaviour at the BOP through the facets of social constructivism (perceived persuasion) and situational factors (clientelism and coercion). This study also contributes to political marketing literature, particularly in the BOP context. It helps in better understanding the influence of social structures surrounding BOP communities that affect their voting behaviour. The findings will also be useful to the political parties and politicians to target the BOP vote bank effectively. At the same time, it will help the government authorities, policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders formulate plans, programs and strategies to help BOP people elect candidates to improve their socio-economic conditions and welfare. Practically, the findings will assist public policymakers interested in formulating programs to help BOP people, particularly those in the context of this study in West Bengal, India, and those with similar socio-economic characteristics, elect candidates who can improve their socio-economic conditions.