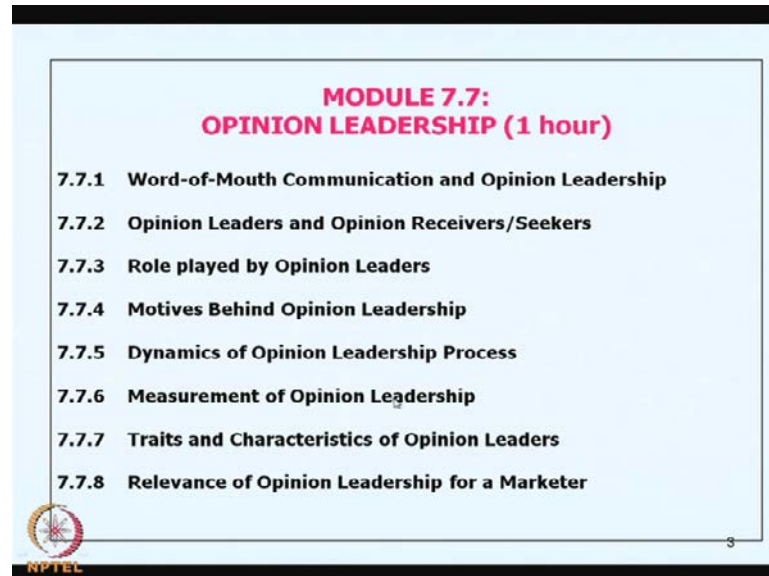


Consumer Behaviour
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Lecture - 38
Opinion Leadership

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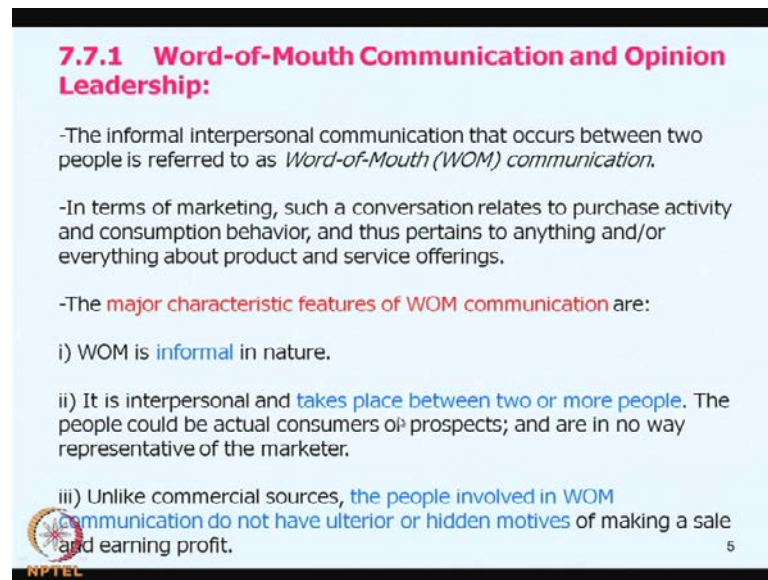
MODULE 7.7:
OPINION LEADERSHIP (1 hour)

- 7.7.1 Word-of-Mouth Communication and Opinion Leadership**
- 7.7.2 Opinion Leaders and Opinion Receivers/Seekers**
- 7.7.3 Role played by Opinion Leaders**
- 7.7.4 Motives Behind Opinion Leadership**
- 7.7.5 Dynamics of Opinion Leadership Process**
- 7.7.6 Measurement of Opinion Leadership**
- 7.7.7 Traits and Characteristics of Opinion Leaders**
- 7.7.8 Relevance of Opinion Leadership for a Marketer**

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We will be continuing with our discussion on the sociological influences on consumer decision making and today, we shall be talking about opinion leadership. This module 7.7 is opinion leadership which we shall be completing in a total of one hour, and we shall be speaking about word of mouth communication, opinion leadership, opinion leaders and opinion receivers or seekers, the role played by opinion leaders, the motives behind opinion leadership, the dynamics of the opinion leadership process, measurement of opinion leadership, traits and characteristics of opinion leaders and the relevance of opinion leader for a marketer. So, let us begin with our discussion on word of mouth communication and opinion leadership.

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7.7.1 Word-of-Mouth Communication and Opinion Leadership:

- The informal interpersonal communication that occurs between two people is referred to as *Word-of-Mouth (WOM) communication*.
- In terms of marketing, such a conversation relates to purchase activity and consumption behavior, and thus pertains to anything and/or everything about product and service offerings.
- The major characteristic features of WOM communication are:
 - i) WOM is informal in nature.
 - ii) It is interpersonal and takes place between two or more people. The people could be actual consumers or prospects; and are in no way representative of the marketer.
 - iii) Unlike commercial sources, the people involved in WOM communication do not have ulterior or hidden motives of making a sale and earning profit.

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Now, in the previous session, we have spoken about the informal interpersonal communication that takes place between consumers or between prospects and with respect to a product or a price or the store or the promotion, any in all of these which we will refer to as an interaction that takes place between two people which is essentially related to marketing and refer to as a word of mouth communication. So, this informal communication that occurs between two people, we term it as word of mouth communication. In terms of marketing, it refers to any conversation which relates to the purchase activity or anything which pertains with respect to the product or service offering. Now, the major characteristics of word of mouth communication are:

1. It is something which is very informal in nature.
2. It takes place between two or more people. These people may be either consumers or prospects and in no way the representative of the marketer and...
3. Unlike commercial sources, the people involved in this communication process do not have any ulterior motive or any hidden motive of making a sale or of earning a profit.

So, these are some characteristics, features of word of mouth communication.

1. They are informal.

2. It takes place between two or more people and in no way are these people related to the marketing act, where you know the representative and...

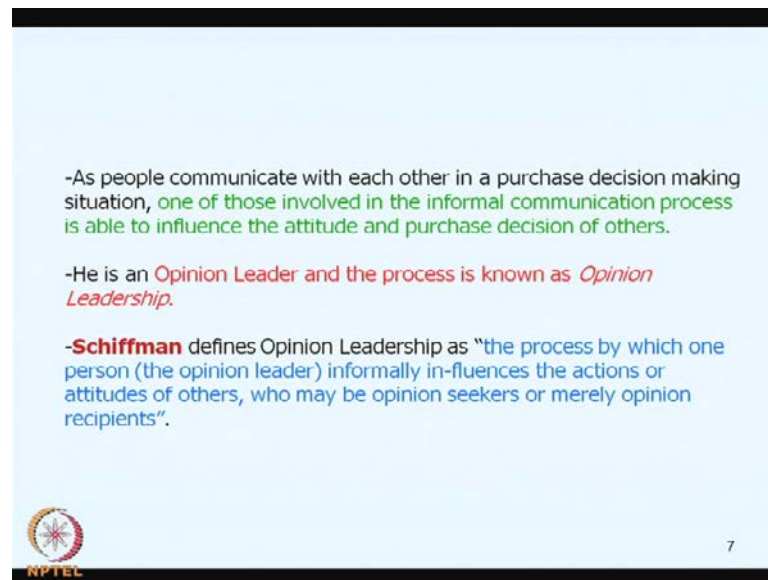
3. The sources, unlike the commercial sources, these sources are something which is regarded as more credible, more reliable, more trust worthy because people involved in this communication do not have any kind of an ulterior or hidden motive.

Now, word of mouth communication relates to a face to face informal communication. However, this communication can also be through telephonic conversation or through internet, chatting or blogging or any form of conversation that takes place between two people and it could assume verbal and non verbal forms. So, it could also be in the form of body gestures or expressions or body language and it could also be in the form of certain acts of behavior. So, as people communicate with one another with respect to purchase situation, one of the persons is involved in the informal character and informal communication is able to have an influence over others.

So, as two people are interacting informally inter personally with each other, one of them acts tends to become stronger, tends to be more forth right in his discussion with respect to a particular product or a service or a brand, and this person we know tries to influence the attitude and behavior of the other person. He tries to influence the opinions, the value judgments, the beliefs, the previous positions or even the acts of behavior of the other person. So, he is referred to as an opinion leader and the person who will become resubmissive to the opinions or to the value judgments of the opinion leader are referred to as opinion seekers or opinion receivers.

So, as we come, as we see people communicate in this purchase decision making, as they communicate with each other, one of those in informal communication tends to become more powerful and as able to exert his influence and you know attitude on other person and this person is referred to as the opinion leader.


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-As people communicate with each other in a purchase decision making situation, one of those involved in the informal communication process is able to influence the attitude and purchase decision of others.

-He is an Opinion Leader and the process is known as Opinion Leadership.

-Schiffman defines Opinion Leadership as "the process by which one person (the opinion leader) informally influences the actions or attitudes of others, who may be opinion seekers or merely opinion recipients".



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In fact, Schiffman defines opinion leadership as the process by which one person which is the opinion leader, informally influences the action or attitudes of others, who may be opinion seekers or opinion recipients. So, opinion leadership is a process in which one person who is the opinion leader is able to influence the attitudes or the actions of another person who will be either the opinion leaders, who will be either opinion seekers or opinion receivers.

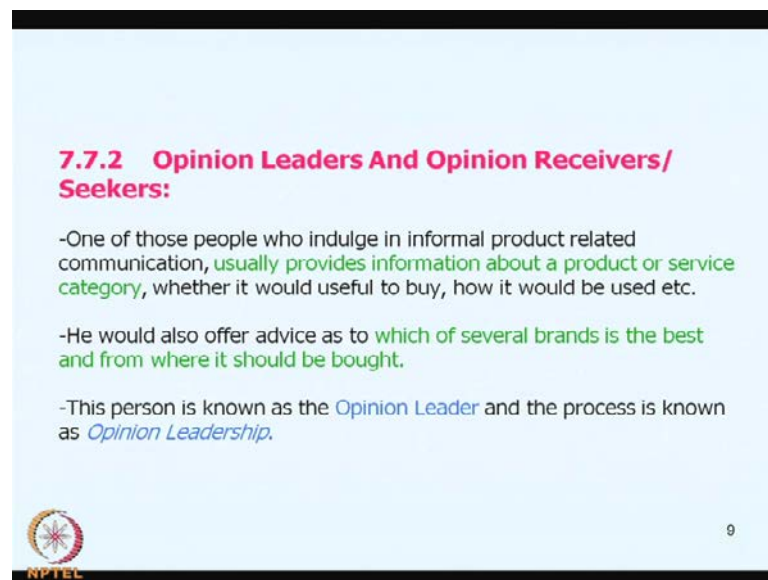
The identification of an opinion leader and their behavior is very dynamic. Opinion leadership process is very crucial for a marketer. Once these people have been identified as opinion leaders, the marketers can target these people or with their marketing makes. So, they can, marketer can basically target their marketing efforts on to these people.

Yesterday, we have discussed the two level theory of communication and the multi-level theory of communication, where we saw the vital rule as is played by the opinion leader. Especially, when we spoke about the multi-step story, we saw how information from the mass media comes to the opinion leader who basically comprehensate it, interprets it, analyze it and then when transmitted to the others who will be either opinion seekers or opinion receivers. So, the opinion leader has an important role to play and once you know marketer is able to identify the opinion leader and his action and understand his behavior and once the marketer is also able to understand the dynamics of the opinion leadership process, he can direct all his marketing efforts towards such as opinion

leaders. The marketers can provide information and advice to the opinion leaders and through the word of mouth communication, you know through inter informal communication or through word of mouth communication, the opinion leaders make the job very easy for the marketer.


So, in case in when the marketer is successfully able to identify opinion leaders, he would direct all his market efforts to them and the opinion leader through his informer interpersonal communication with information or opinion receivers and opinion seekers, he will be able to transmit the information with respect to a product or a service or a brand. So, that is why the role for the opinion leader is very important to the marketer.

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7.7.2 Opinion Leaders And Opinion Receivers/ Seekers:

- One of those people who indulge in informal product related communication, usually provides information about a product or service category, whether it would be useful to buy, how it would be used etc.
- He would also offer advice as to which of several brands is the best and from where it should be bought.
- This person is known as the Opinion Leader and the process is known as Opinion Leadership.

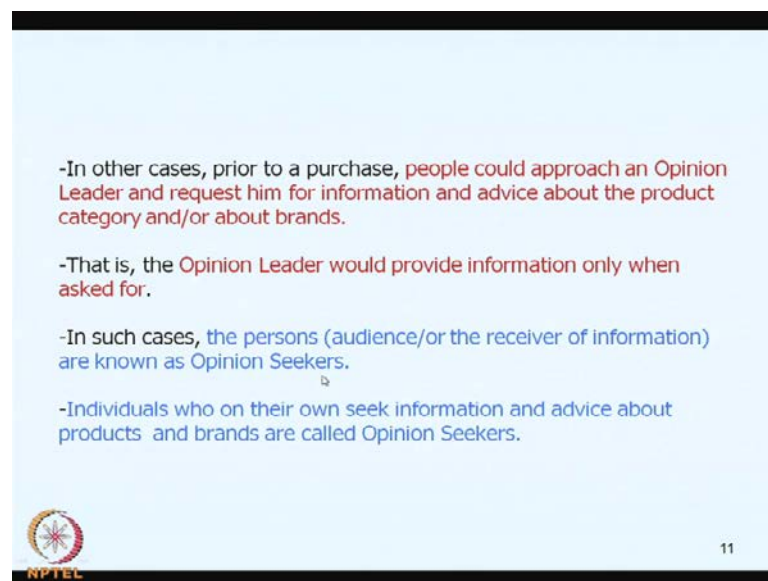
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Now, let us move beyond and discuss topic about opinion leaders and receivers and seekers. So, when people indulge in an informal product related communication, one of those persons usually provides information and he will talk about whether the product is useful to buy or how it would be used, then how it is better than alternatives. He would also give advice as to which service brands is the best, which is the best brand and from where it should be bought. So, this person who dominates the discussion with respect to providing product related knowledge or advice or to share his experiences and become a little more powerful over the other becomes what we call as the opinion leader and the process is referred to as opinion leadership process.

So, one of those people who indulges in informal product relation information usually provides information about the product, about the category, product category, about the brand, about which of the brands to buy, which not to buy, which is good, which is not good and this person through his product news or through his advice or through his sharing of experience is able to influence another person and he comes to be known as an opinion leader and the process is known as opinion leadership.

Now, in some cases, the opinion leaders just like to talk about product or service category and he provides information voluntarily. He voluntarily provide information about the product or service category because he is involved in the product or service category and loves to talk about it and loves to share about his information. Also, he feels the sense of pride in acting as an expert in the product or service category. So, he provides product or service related information voluntarily and the people who listen to him are referred to as opinion receivers.

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-In other cases, prior to a purchase, people could approach an Opinion Leader and request him for information and advice about the product category and/or about brands.

-That is, the Opinion Leader would provide information only when asked for.

-In such cases, the persons (audience/or the receiver of information) are known as Opinion Seekers.

-Individuals who on their own seek information and advice about products and brands are called Opinion Seekers.

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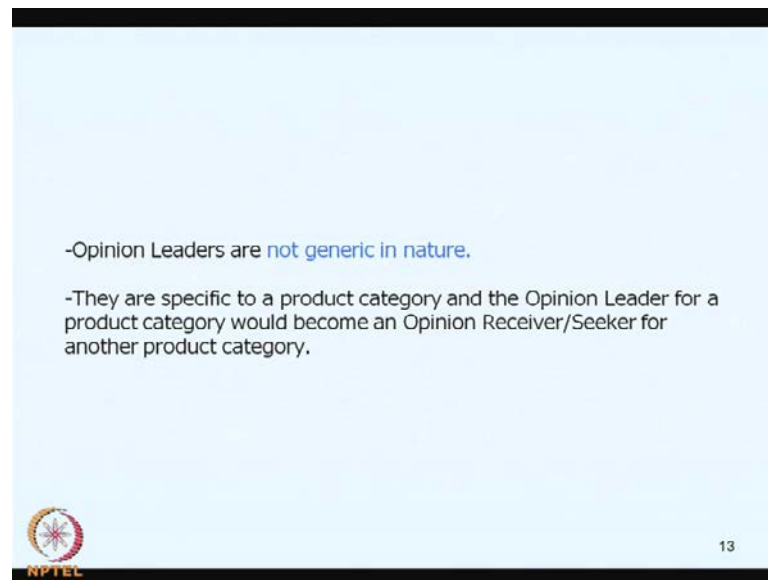
On the other hand, the opinion leader may sometime provide information when people approach him or when they question him for information and advice about a product or service category or about the brand. So, in this particular case, the people basically you know approach the opinion leader and the opinion leader provides information only and only when asked for. So, in such cases, the audience or the receiver or the message or the person who actually seek to this information is referred to as an opinion seeker. So, the

opinion you know people who are provided information voluntarily by the opinion leader and you know such people who are active or passive or passive listeners to this information are referred to as opinion receivers. On the other hand, those people who put in effort and consciously put in effort to ask or request to opinion leader for information are referred to as opinion seekers. So, individuals who on their own you know approach in a leader and seek information or seek advice are referred to as opinion seekers.

So, now, there is a two way exchange of information that takes place as between the opinion leader and the opinion receivers or opinion seekers. We have discussed in the multi-step flow of communication theory, where we said that the interaction between the opinion leader and the opinion receiver or the seekers is something with the two-way interaction, where the opinion leader provides product news, knowledge or advice or information or experiences, share the experiences with the opinion seekers and the opinion seekers and receivers also get back through their opinions, through their feedback. So, the opinion is both with a two way interaction that take place and both opinion leader and opinion seekers or receivers, you know interact with this two way communication process.

This actually is the good form of the basis of the opinion leadership process. As opinion receivers and opinion seekers interact or get feedback or with other information, it also sometimes adds to the information base of the opinion leader and it adds to his learning patterns, adds to his memory bank and this is what we refer to as associated network.

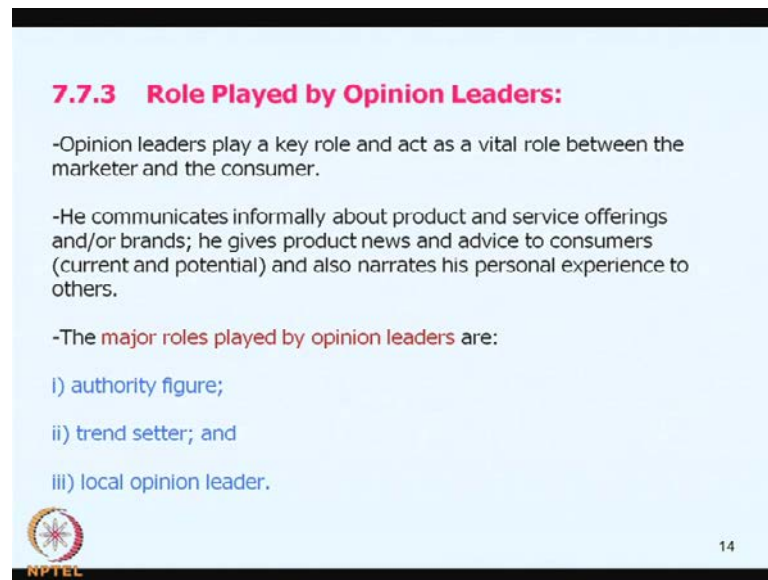
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So, what is very important here is to understand that opinion leaders are not generic in nature. They are specific to a particular product category and they become specific to a particular product category and will become an opinion receiver or opinion seeker for another product category. So, when we talk about opinion leaders, we have to be very clear about one get opinion leader are some which are product service category specific. They are experts, they are opinion leaders for a particular product or service category and for another product or service category, they could resume roles of an opinion seeker or an opinion receiver. So, it is something which is not a generic process.


Now, let us come to the role to be played by the opinion leaders. They play a very important role. They play very key role, but they play as interface between the marketer and the consumer. They act as a very vital role. They communicate with the consumer with respect to the product or service offerings, about the brands, they give product news, they give advice to customers, both current and the potential customers and also narrate their personal experiences to all of them, who either approach them consciously for information or the others who are listeners to this particular conversation or dialogue from the opinion leader, but those roles played by the opinion leaders and those roles could be studied in three forms. One authority figure, two trend setter and three, local opinion leader.

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7.7.3 Role Played by Opinion Leaders:

- Opinion leaders play a key role and act as a vital role between the marketer and the consumer.
- He communicates informally about product and service offerings and/or brands; he gives product news and advice to consumers (current and potential) and also narrates his personal experience to others.
- The major roles played by opinion leaders are:
 - i) authority figure;
 - ii) trend setter; and
 - iii) local opinion leader.

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So, these are the major roles that are played by the opinion leaders in the form of an authority figure, trend setter and local opinion leader.

So, what is an authority figure? Now, when the opinion leaders provide product news and advice and also narrates his personal experiences to consumers, it is said to assume an authority figure role. By providing information, by providing product news advice and rating his experiences, he helps customers both current and potential customer satisfy their need for information and advice and it makes the purchase decision making process much easy both in terms of physical and cognitive effort. So, whenever he narrates his experiences or provides advice or share, gives product news, he said to perform the authority figure role. Now, they are able to perform this role because they are experts in a particular category.

As I just mentioned, opinion leadership is something which is not generic. It is restricted to product or service category and the opinion leader is able to perform his role as an authority figure only and only because he is an expert in a particular category and he acts as an expert, he acts as an authority in that particular product or service category. He has knowledge, he has the expertise, he has the experience with this category and that is why people approach him, people value him, people look up to him with credibility because he is regarded as an authority, he is regarded as an expert and he is regarded as a very experienced person with respect to either information or the usage of this product or

service category. He would be in a best position to give an advice whether a purchase should be made and if yes, if a purchase had to be made, what should be purchase or what brand should be bought.

So, because of his power as an expert, because of his ability and his skill and because of his expertise in a particular product or service category, he is able to provide valuable answers to whether purchases to be made at all and if a purchase is to be made, what kind of brands should be bought. So, he performs the role of an authority figure and while performing this role, he also helps consumers reduce the level of physical and cognitive efforts that they put into completing their purchase decision making process and while providing information, he also helps him to reduce the level of purchase risk that comes along, especially with respect to high involvement product. So, opinion leaders as when they play this authority figure role, they feel a sense of pride, they have a sense of prestige associated with this particular role because they feel people have approached them because he or she is regarded as an expert, as a very knowledgeable person with respect to product service category.

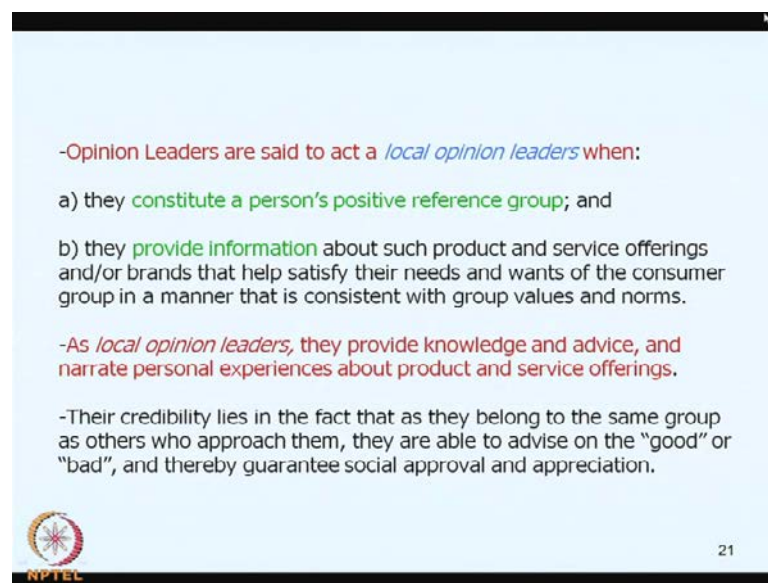
Now, another role which is played by opinion leader is of the trend setter. Opinion leaders in a directorate, they do not bother about what other says or what people in the society do. They are also innovators and they often go to purchase the service or product offering which is new in the market and they through the purchase or through their usage of this new product, they also set trend. So, they also act as trend setters. Also, when they buy something and they use something and when they share their experiences with others often influencing others to emulate them, they act they perform this role which we refer to as the trend setter role. So, the narrator of acts of their personal experiences and others emulate them. So, in this way, opinion leaders also act as trend setters. Now, once a trend is set, other people will copy them and as trend setter, opinion leaders could belong to membership or a non-membership reference group. Opinion leaders also act as another role which is the local opinion leader.

What we mean by local opinion leader? Now, people generally like to behave similar to what people in the reference group of behaving. This is also specific, more specific to their primary reference rules where people have face to face regular interaction with other members, be it family, be it friends and be it neighbors and be it people in the society. So, the people seek social approval, people seeks a social acceptance and they

try to do what other people in their contractual or their membership group are doing and even people in their aspiration and in non-membership group are doing. Now, people from such groups directly or indirectly, they provide information and advice that helps the consumers to make purchase decisions and by search goods and service offering which people in their contractual and their primary groups of people in their may in the aspirational and their non membership groups are doing.

So, in this form, other opinion leaders also act as a local opinion leader. He is in regular interaction with other people in the group and the people who are opinion receivers or opinion seekers look up to him as a leader, as a local leader, as a part of their membership group or their primary reference group or their contractual group or even in certain cases, you know as somebody who may be an aspirational reference or you know non-membership group. So, people from such groups directly or indirectly provide information that helps consumers make purchase decision and goods and services and they buy brands that contractual an aspiration groups actually in of.

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-Opinion Leaders are said to act a *local opinion leaders* when:

- a) they *constitute a person's positive reference group*; and
- b) they *provide information* about such product and service offerings and/or brands that help satisfy their needs and wants of the consumer group in a manner that is consistent with group values and norms.

-*As local opinion leaders, they provide knowledge and advice, and narrate personal experiences about product and service offerings.*

-Their credibility lies in the fact that as they belong to the same group as others who approach them, they are able to advise on the "good" or "bad", and thereby guarantee social approval and appreciation.



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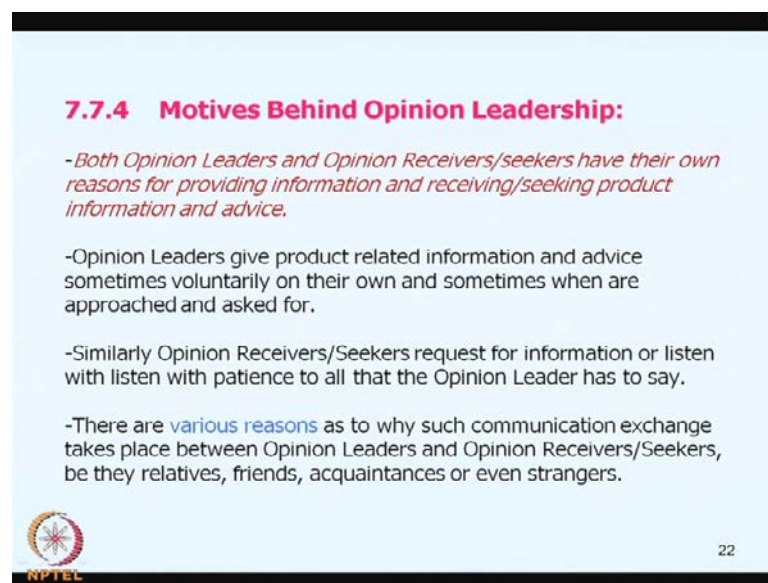
In fact, opinion leaders are regarded to be the opinion leaders in when:

1. They constitute a person's positive reference group.
2. They provide information about a product or service offerings or about a brand that satisfy their needs and wants of the consumer group which is inconsistency with the

group values and norms. So, as local opinion leaders, they provide knowledge and advice and narrate experiences about product and service offerings and their credibility lies in the fact that as they belong to the same group as others who approach them. So, they are able to advice on the good or bad and thereby guarantee social approval and appreciation.


So, as opinion leader, one, he is a part of the reference group, two, he provide information with respective product service offering which will satisfy the needs and wants of people and this will be consistence with group rules or the norms of the group values and as a local leader, they provide lot of knowledge, information and advice and they narrate their personal experiences and credibility of such opinion leaders or such local opinion leaders lies in fact, they belong to the same group or the same reference group or the membership group and they are able to advice in the best possible manner what is good and what is bad. So, as to lead he know search to actually guarantee social approval and social acceptance amongst the people or amongst the classes.

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7.7.4 Motives Behind Opinion Leadership:

- Both Opinion Leaders and Opinion Receivers/seekers have their own reasons for providing information and receiving/seeking product information and advice.*
- Opinion Leaders give product related information and advice sometimes voluntarily on their own and sometimes when are approached and asked for.
- Similarly Opinion Receivers/Seekers request for information or listen with listen with patience to all that the Opinion Leader has to say.
- There are various reasons as to why such communication exchange takes place between Opinion Leaders and Opinion Receivers/Seekers, be they relatives, friends, acquaintances or even strangers.

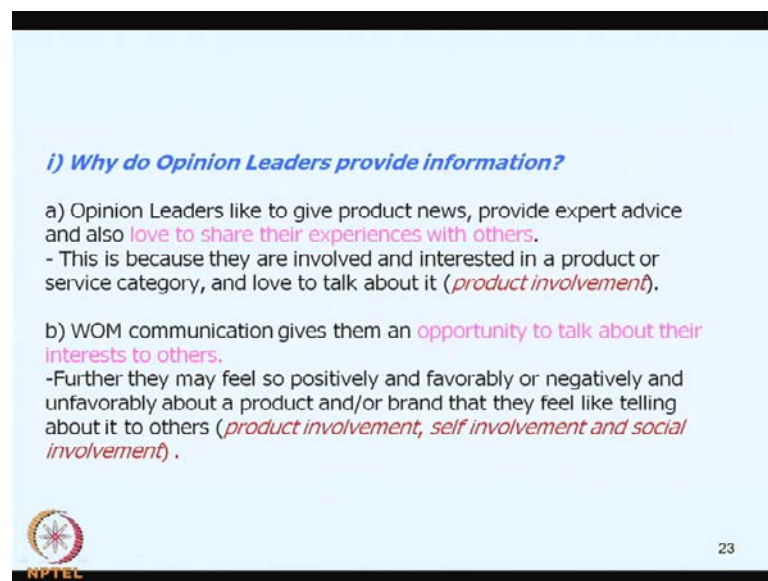
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Now, this brings us to the next topic which is motives behind an opinion leadership. Why does an opinion leader provide information and why does opinion receiver or seeker solicit information? So, both the opinion leader and opinion receiver or seekers had their own reasons for providing information or for seeking information. Opinion leaders like to talk about a product or service category. They provide information, they provide

advice and they share their experiences, they also like to talk about it sometimes voluntarily and sometimes when asked for and they like to talk in length about their interest or their product or service category of their interest. On the other hand, their opinion receivers who are mere recipients of the dialogue which actually has been initiated by the opinion leader in terms of opinion seekers, they have their own motive or their own reason while they approach opinion leaders asking for advice. So, opinion leaders give product related information and advice, sometimes are their own and sometimes when they are approached or asked for.

An opinion receivers and seekers also request for information or listen with patience all that opinion leaders has to say. Now, the various reasons for such communication exchange that takes place between the opinion leaders and the opinion receivers or the opinion leader and opinion seeker, we will talk about that, but first, why do opinion leaders provide the information?


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i) Why do Opinion Leaders provide information?

a) Opinion Leaders like to give product news, provide expert advice and also love to share their experiences with others.
- This is because they are involved and interested in a product or service category, and love to talk about it (*product involvement*).

b) WOM communication gives them an opportunity to talk about their interests to others.
- Further they may feel so positively and favorably or negatively and unfavorably about a product and/or brand that they feel like telling about it to others (*product involvement, self involvement and social involvement*).

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Now, opinion leaders may like to talk about product service category, they may like to give product news or advice or they may love to share their experiences with respect to product category. All this is because they are involved about a product category, they know a lot about it, they are interested in that product category and they love talking about it. So, the first reason why the opinion leaders will want to share their in product news or advice for information or even share experiences with others is because they are


involved in a particular product or service category and they are interested in it and they simply love talking about it.

So, product involvement is very high and because of this reason, they want to talk in length about it. They not only gather information or gather knowledge from various sources of the product service category which is going to be ongoing process which is also going to be an enduring involvement, and because of this long process or long ongoing process and this enduring involvement which they have with the product or service category, they collect a lot of information, they ponder over it, they comprehend it and they then want to transmit it by talking more and more about it. We have discussed earlier in our chapter on involvement, where we said that people who are highly involved in a product category not only seek information, but also like to comprehend and transmit it. So, one of the reasons why opinion leaders want to share product news or advice or experiences with others are because they are involved in that particular product category and they want to talk about their interest to others.

Second is, they get an opportunity to share their interest or share their interest for the particular product or service category with others. They feel so positively or so negatively about a product service offering that they want to talk either very favorably about it or by telling all positives about it to others. On the other hand, they may talk or they may feel very negative or unfavorable towards a product of service offering or a brand and they want to talk very negative about it or against it.

So, either they may feel positive and want to talk favorably or they feel negative and want to talk unfavorably and they want to tell other people all about it. So, there is product involvement and there is self-involvement with the product and as well as their experiences and they want to convert to social involvement with others around them. Also, if they have something negative or something unfavorable to say about the product or service category, they would do so in greater length and greater depth because favorable or positive feelings for a particular product or service offering I have people who have profound and more impact on people.

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c) As they possess knowledge, expertise and experience with a product category, they feel important and powerful when people approach them for information and advice.

- It gives them a sense of superiority or special status over others.
- They take pride in providing information and advice (*self gratification, power and pride*).

d) They may be genuinely be benevolent and generous, and out of altruistic concerns may like to help others, especially family, friends, relatives and neighbours (*selfless motive: social involvement*).

e) Opinion Leaders may be also trying to reduce their own level of post-purchase cognitive dissonance (*self-interest*).

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So, as the third reason by providing information, they feel he knows everything. Especially, when people approach them, they feel very important and powerful as they feel that they are experts in a particular product or service category and that is why people have approached them for product news, advice or for sharing of experiences. So, it gives them a sense of superiority, it gives them sense of pride and it gives them special status and they take pride in providing information and sharing information with others. So, it is a feeling of self gratification, it is a feeling of pride and it is a feeling of being very powerful.

Another reason why people give information is because by nature, they are benevolent and generous and out of their altruistic concern for others, they want to share information with their family, with their friends and others.

So, in the first case where we spoke about, they feeling important or they feeling proud or they feeling very superior because of their knowledge, this particular thing would hold true when people go to them for information, people request or ask information from them, but in the other case where it is a feeling of benevolence or altruism or generosity, in such cases, they simply like to talk about it and will tell others even without information being sort for. So, while feeling important or proud or powerful is something which will happen when opinion seekers go to them. The feeling of generosity,

benevolence and altruism which is illustrated when it is not the opinion seeker, but it is more of the opinion receiver.

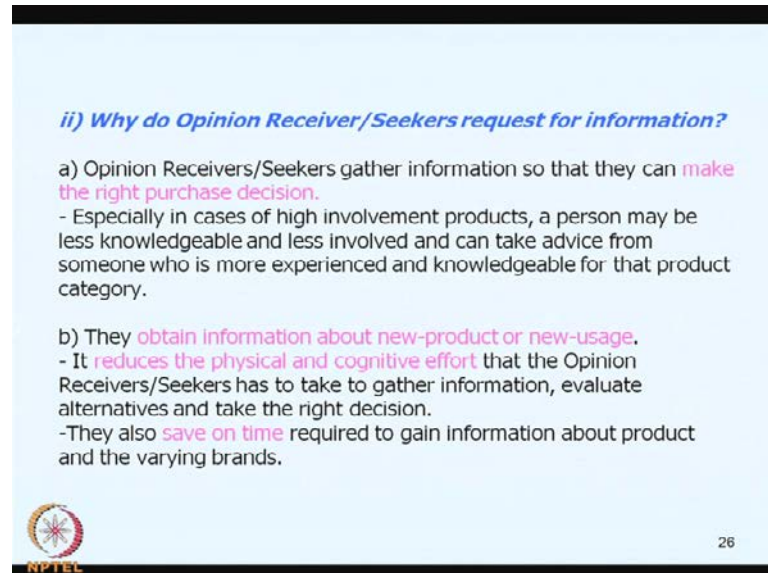
So, a dialogue between the opinion leader and the opinion receiver, actually this particular transaction of ideas, exchange of ideas is when they out of their altruism, out of their benevolence or out of their generosity, they want to help others, they want to spread the message around, they want to talk about it and they want to help. So, it is more of a selfless motive and more of a social involvement.

Another reason why the opinion leaders share information or like to talk about a product or service category is because they want to reduce their own level of cognitive dissonance. So, this is what has to do with self interest motive in mind. So, out of self interest also, they would want to share information because they want to reduce their level of cognitive dissonance. This is particularly true when in cases where one of the product is new and they want to reassure that they make the right choice or they may be wanting somebody else to try the new product before they actually go out and buy or another case where they have been dissatisfied by the product or like to complain about the purchase of a product service offspring all about this to over where it has been purchased.

So, these all cases are where it is self interest. So, in the first case, they like to talk about it because they are involved in the product category. So, it is more like a product involvement. In the second motive where they want to talk about it because they find it an interesting topic of study. Again it is a product and social involvement. In cases where they feel sense of pride and power by talking to others, by sharing their expertise with others, in this case it is more to do with feeling of self-gratification, power and pride. When it is you know the opinion leaders try to act generous or benevolent or altruism taking that it is basically more off as selfless motivate, but again we will have also have a selfish motive where he is trying to reduce his own level of cognitive dissonance or it is a new product and he want somebody else to try it out. Again it is a selfish motive. He has bought a product, he is uncomfortable about it and he wants to reassure that he made the right choice by making somebody else buy it. That is again a selfish motive and third is he has bought something and he is dissatisfied by the product of service offering of the brand and now, he wants to complain about the purchase of a particular product or of brand or of store or a company or the store from which it was purchased. So, all these

cases is a selfish motive which makes him talk or which makes him share product news, advice or his experiences with higher opinion receivers or with opinion seekers.

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ii) Why do Opinion Receiver/Seekers request for information?

a) Opinion Receivers/Seekers gather information so that they can **make the right purchase decision**.

- Especially in cases of high involvement products, a person may be less knowledgeable and less involved and can take advice from someone who is more experienced and knowledgeable for that product category.

b) They **obtain information about new-product or new-usage**.


- It **reduces the physical and cognitive effort** that the Opinion Receivers/Seekers has to take to gather information, evaluate alternatives and take the right decision.
- They also **save on time** required to gain information about product and the varying brands.

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Now, if we go beyond, we see that even opinion receivers or seekers also request for information and they have their own motives which actually lead them to request information or to seek information. The first reason why they seek information or they request for information is so that make the derive purchase decision. This is more relevant for high involvement product where people may not be involved in a product category and so, they have less information or less knowledge with respect to a particular product or service category. So, they take the help or they take this support of people who are more experienced or more knowledgeable for that product category.

So, this is one reason where they do so, so that they can make direct purchasing decision. Another reason why opinion receivers or seekers ask for information is with respect to new products or with new usage is that it helps to reduce their physical and cognitive effort that they will have to put in when it comes to gathering information about new products or evaluating the alternative and making the right decision. It is not only the physical and cognitive effort that comes along, but it is also true with matters of time. So, such people approach the opinion leader, so the opinion leader can provide them with right knowledge or the right advice and the opinion seekers can save on time which is required to make decision with respect to that which is a new product.

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c) Product knowledge and advice **reduces the level of uncertainty associated with a purchase.**
-It helps them reduce the perceived risk as they are able to gain product and/or brand knowledge from experts, who are also many a times innovators and first-time users of the product.

d) They prefer word-of-mouth communication over other marketing communication as they believe that while the latter have an ulterior interest in making sales, the former is **more credible with no ulterior motives.**

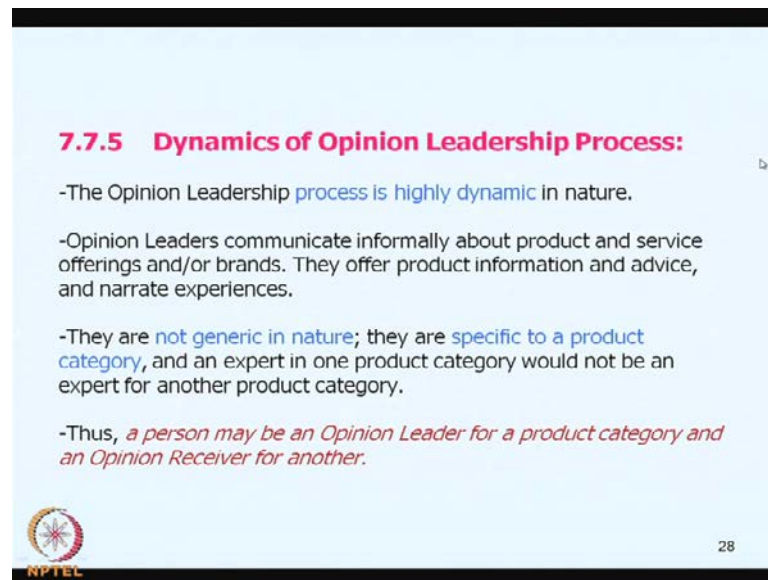
e) People also turn to Opinion Leaders so as to **confirm their purchase decisions.**
-This is particularly true for high involvement products, as also for products that need social approval and/or match social class and social status.

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Product knowledge also reduces the level of uncertainty associated with a purchase. When opinion seekers go to opinion leaders for advice and seek their solid support, it helps them and reduce their perceived risk because they feel that they have approached an expert, they have approached a knowledgeable person and kind of the information or the knowledge or the advise that such a person will give them is something which is credible and trustworthy. This is more important when we are talking about new products or when we will be talking about the first time users of particular product of service category.


Now, another reason while people go to opinion leader is because they feel opinion leaders of credible or trustworthy and they have no ulterior or hidden motives and unlike marketing communication and unlike leaders and sales people who have an ulterior motive of making a sale or earning a revenue and finally people also turn to opinion leaders to confirm their purchase decisions and to reduce the level of cognitive dissonance that follow the purchase. So, this is typically relevant for high involvement product or product which is really true to social class because their issues of social approval and social acceptance also have a great role to place. So, people turn to opinion leaders to confirm their purchase decisions and also to social approval and social acceptance from members of their social class including the opinion leader.

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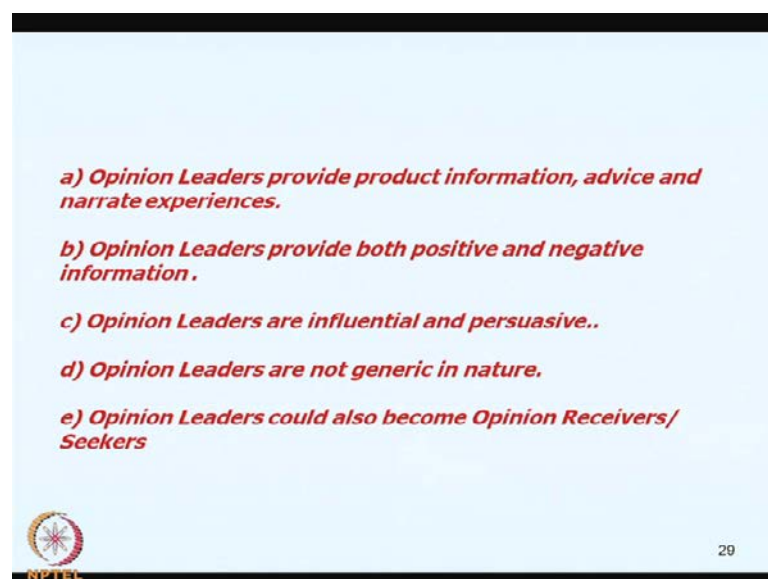
7.7.5 Dynamics of Opinion Leadership Process:

- The Opinion Leadership process is highly dynamic in nature.
- Opinion Leaders communicate informally about product and service offerings and/or brands. They offer product information and advice, and narrate experiences.
- They are not generic in nature; they are specific to a product category, and an expert in one product category would not be an expert for another product category.
- Thus, a person may be an Opinion Leader for a product category and an Opinion Receiver for another.


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Now, let us come to the next which is dynamics of the opinion leadership process. We know leadership is a very dynamic process. Opinion leaders talk about the product of service category. They provide product information advice and news and they are not generic in nature. They are product category specific and expert in particular product category seek an opinion in the particular product category becomes an opinion receiver or a seeker for another product category. So, the person may be an opinion leader for a product category, but he becomes an opinion seeker or a receiver for another product category.

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- a) Opinion Leaders provide product information, advice and narrate experiences.**
- b) Opinion Leaders provide both positive and negative information.**
- c) Opinion Leaders are influential and persuasive..**
- d) Opinion Leaders are not generic in nature.**
- e) Opinion Leaders could also become Opinion Receivers/ Seekers**

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Now, let us talk of the dynamic in terms of few points. The first point which we will discuss is that opinion leaders provide product information and advice and its experiences. They talk informally; they communicate informally about product in service offspring that over bands and act as authority figures, trends, set as a local opinion leaders. They also provide both positive and negative information. They talk with favorable and unfavorable about a product of service category, about the various brands. Now, compared to positive and neutral information that they provide, the impact of negative information are known as unfavorable information is much greater and has bigger impact on opinion receivers or an opinion seeker than anything which is positively sets.

So, any kind of statement which is positive or neutral will not have that kind of impact which is negative statement made by an opinion leader. So, opinion leaders provide both positive and negative information and negative information provided that the opinion leader has more to profound and deeper effect on opinion receivers or opinions seekers. Third, opinion leaders are influential and persuasive. They provide credible information about the product, about the service category, about their experience. People look up to such people or approach such people for advice or for help. Why? Because opinion leaders are regarded as subject experts. They are regarded as an expert in particular product service category, they are regarded as very knowledgeable and highly experience. Also, since there is no issue of monetary compensations, there is no hidden or ulterior motive associated with them.

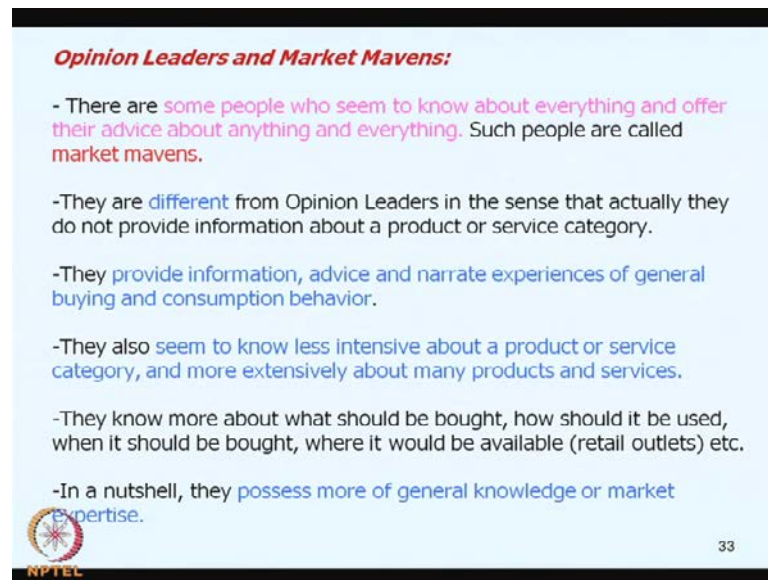
The opinion seekers find them more credible and more trustworthy sources and they feel because there is no monetary compensation involved and in no way is the opinion leader get benefitted from marketer. So, that information that is going to provide is something which is going to be genuine, unbiased and absolutely objective because there is no monetary compensation attached or there is no ulterior or hidden motive attached from the marketer to the opinion leaders. Because the opinion demand receivers feel that because there is no way is the opinion leader going to benefit from the marketer in terms of a monetary compensation. So, there is no ulterior motive, there is no hidden motive and there is no monetary compensation involved, nothing at all. So, the information that comes is going to be absolutely objective, very unbiased, very credible and very genuine. Also, because there are no hidden or ulterior motives of their own, that is of making a

sale or earning a revenue or earning a profit, so the information that they provide will be very credible and because also they are regarded to be selfless without any selfish interest is regarded something which is to the best interest of everybody whether it is consumer or at current or prospect consumers or even society at large.

So, that is reason why opinion leaders are regarded as highly influential and persuasive. They are subject experts, they are selfless, they have no motive, there is no monetary compensation from the marketer which is known to come in to them and they have no hidden and ulterior motives.


So, whatever information that they are going to provide is going to be absolutely genuine and credible. Opinion leaders are not generic in nature. Opinion leader is specific to a particular product or service category. They possess expertise and specialization in a particular product category and because of their expertise, because of their knowledge, because of their experience in a particular category, people approach them for advice, people look up to them for advice and for the valuable opinion. Now, here we would like to relate something or talk something about market mavens. We have been discussing till now that opinion leaders are category specific, but here when we talk about people whom have happened to know about everything, about different product, different services and everybody goes to them for whatever advice they need. Such people will not fall in our definition of opinion leaders. They will fall into what we call as market mavens.

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Opinion Leaders and Market Mavens:

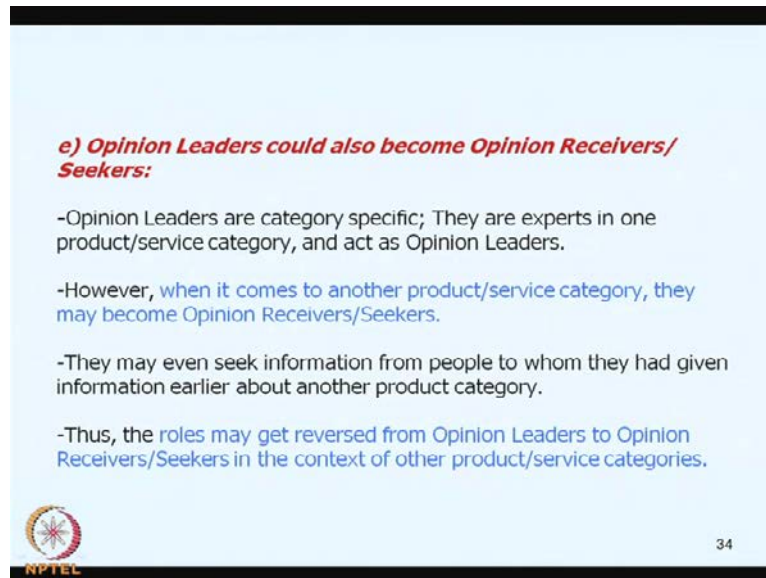
- There are some people who seem to know about everything and offer their advice about anything and everything. Such people are called market mavens.
- They are different from Opinion Leaders in the sense that actually they do not provide information about a product or service category.
- They provide information, advice and narrate experiences of general buying and consumption behavior.
- They also seem to know less intensive about a product or service category, and more extensively about many products and services.
- They know more about what should be bought, how should it be used, when it should be bought, where it would be available (retail outlets) etc.
- In a nutshell, they possess more of general knowledge or market expertise.

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So, there are some people who happen to know about everything and provide their advice about anything and everything. Such people are called market mavens and then they are different from the opinion leaders in the sense that they do not provide information about a particular product or service offering, but they provide information about everything. They talk general, they talk about general mind, they talk about general consumption of behavior, they seem to know less intensive about of a particular product of service category and more extensive about many product or service category.


So, instead of confining them to particular product or services category, they seem to know everything about everything, about every kind of product or service offering. So, such people we will like to talk about anything and everything. They will talk about general trend, they will talk about social trends, economic trends, they will talk about general consumption, petrol consumption behavior, but they are not specific behavior to a particular product or a service category or a brand. So, they are more, they are less intensive with a product or service category and more extensive with many product or service categories and in general, they possess more of general knowledge and marketing expertise rather than specific product knowledge.

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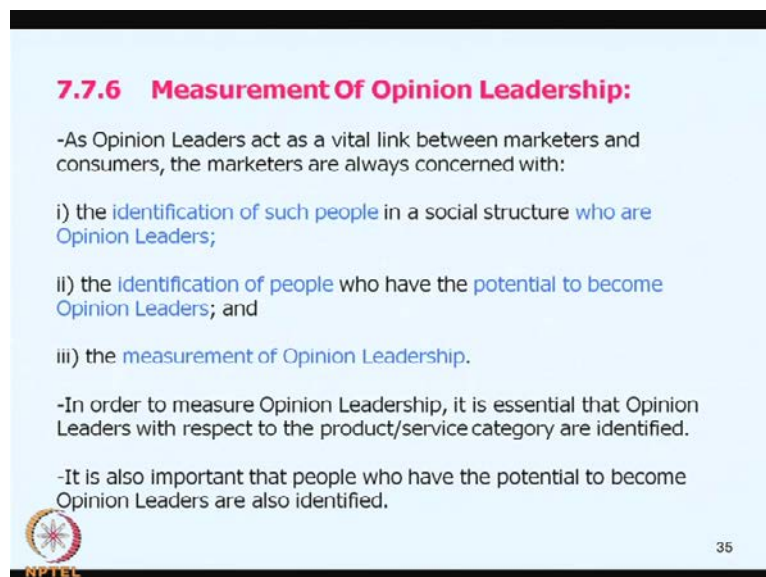
e) Opinion Leaders could also become Opinion Receivers/ Seekers:

- Opinion Leaders are category specific; They are experts in one product/service category, and act as Opinion Leaders.
- However, when it comes to another product/service category, they may become Opinion Receivers/Seekers.
- They may even seek information from people to whom they had given information earlier about another product category.
- Thus, the roles may get reversed from Opinion Leaders to Opinion Receivers/Seekers in the context of other product/service categories.

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So, that is what we call as market mavens and opinion leaders could also become opinion receivers. As we said that they are category specific and leaders in one becomes a seeker in another.

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7.7.6 Measurement Of Opinion Leadership:

- As Opinion Leaders act as a vital link between marketers and consumers, the marketers are always concerned with:
 - i) the identification of such people in a social structure who are Opinion Leaders;
 - ii) the identification of people who have the potential to become Opinion Leaders; and
 - iii) the measurement of Opinion Leadership.
- In order to measure Opinion Leadership, it is essential that Opinion Leaders with respect to the product/service category are identified.
- It is also important that people who have the potential to become Opinion Leaders are also identified.

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Now, let us come to the measurement of opinion leadership. As opinion leaders are very important as a vital link between marketer and consumer, the marketer are always concerned with:

1. Identification of such people in a social structure who are opinion leaders

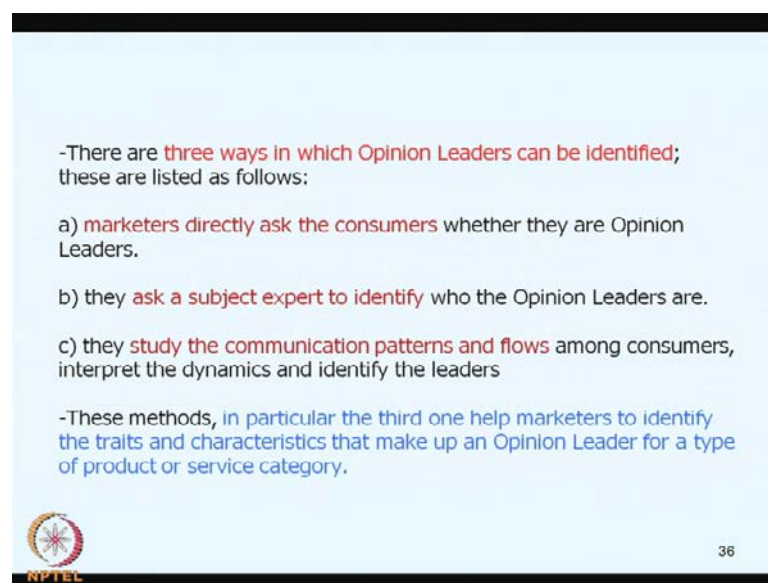
2. Identification of such people who have the potential to become opinion leaders; and
3. How do you measure opinion leadership?

So, three issues which are of interest to marketers is,

1. To identify the social structure who is currently an opinion leader
2. To identify who has the potential to become an opinion leader, and
3. How do you measure opinion leader ship?

So, it is essential that opinion leaders with respect to product or service category identify. It is also important that you identify such people who have the potential to become opinion leaders. So, how does a marketer do that?


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-There are **three ways in which Opinion Leaders can be identified**; these are listed as follows:

- a) **marketers directly ask the consumers** whether they are Opinion Leaders.
- b) they **ask a subject expert to identify** who the Opinion Leaders are.
- c) they **study the communication patterns and flows** among consumers, interpret the dynamics and identify the leaders

-These methods, **in particular the third one help marketers to identify the traits and characteristics that make up an Opinion Leader for a type of product or service category.**



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There are different ways or reason by which an opinion leader can be identified.

1. Marketer directly asks the consumers whether they are opinion leaders. So, he directly question them, are you an opinion leader.
2. Marketer could ask a subject expert to identify who the opinion leader is. So, this is another way by which marketer could identify by asking a subject who is an export how to identify who is opinion leaders; and...

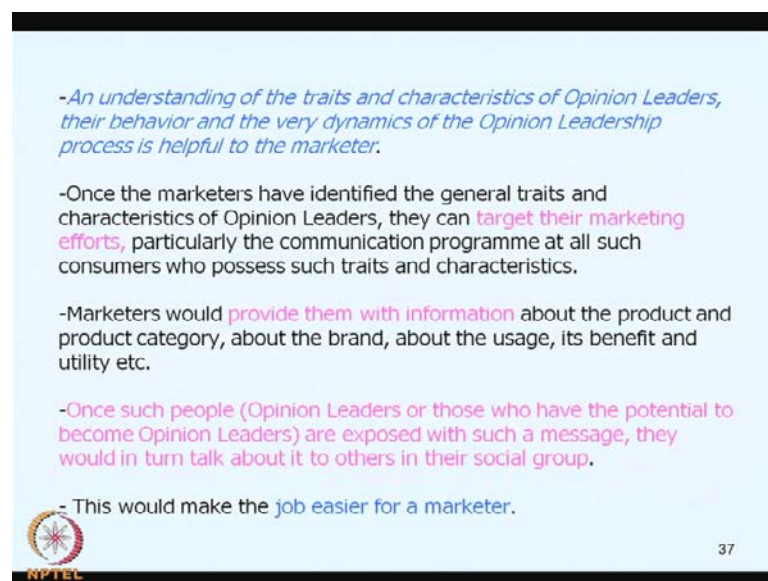
3. By studying well very carefully the communication pattern in the communication flow that takes place between the consumer and understanding the dynamics of this communication process as to who is more powerful in that discussion, who is more (()), who is more dominating in the discussion. The consumer will, the marketable will come to know as out of few, out of the two consumers who is more (()), more dominant and more powerful and could be an opinion leader.

So, there could be three ways by which opinion leaders are identified.

1. By marketer directly asks the consumer if they are opinion leaders.
2. They refer the matter to subject expert and the subject experts identify who the opinion leaders are, and
3. They study the communication flows and the communication pattern of the flows of consumers and they interpret the dynamics.

Now, the third part of which is the study of communication flows and the pattern of these flows basically help marketers to identify the traits and characteristics that make up the opinion leaders. So, all of these methods, primarily the methods which deals with the communication flows and the communication pattern will help marketer to identify or understand the traits and characteristics which make up the union leader.

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- An understanding of the traits and characteristics of Opinion Leaders, their behavior and the very dynamics of the Opinion Leadership process is helpful to the marketer.*
- Once the marketers have identified the general traits and characteristics of Opinion Leaders, they can **target their marketing efforts**, particularly the communication programme at all such consumers who possess such traits and characteristics.
- Marketers would **provide them with information** about the product and product category, about the brand, about the usage, its benefit and utility etc.
- Once such people (Opinion Leaders or those who have the potential to become Opinion Leaders) are **exposed with such a message, they would in turn talk about it to others in their social group.**
- This would make the **job easier for a marketer.**

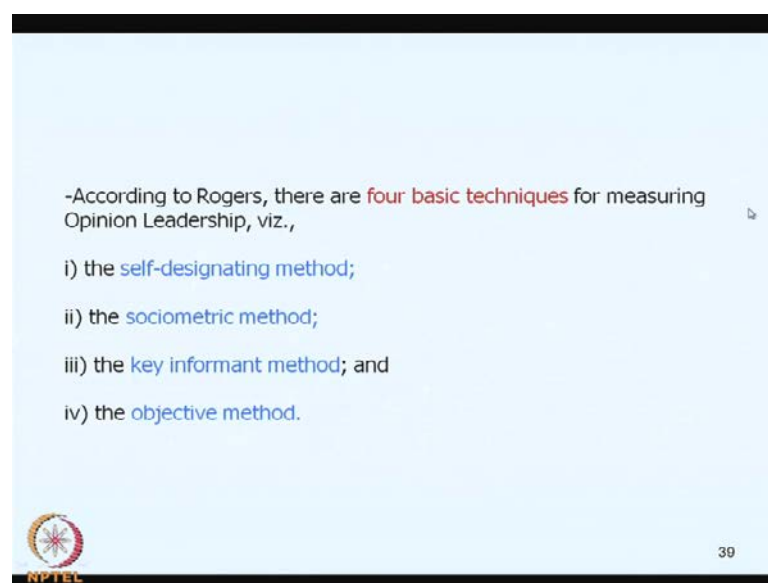
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Now, an understanding of these traits and characteristics is very vital to marketer. Once the marketer has identified these traits and characteristics, he will be able to create definition of:

1. What are the opinion leadership should be like and what are opinion leaders are like
2. The definition of what are the characteristics, what are the traits opinion leaders should have, so that the marketer will be able to identify them. We will then able to target there marketing efforts to such an opinion leader. So, in order to be able to identify the opinion leader is very important that marketer has an understanding of the traits and characteristics that opinion leader should posses.


So, marketers would then use them in their marketing process. We have discussed the two ways and the two steps and the multistep for communication theory and it is very clear that especially in the second theory, in the multistep theory that how the opinion leader plays the vital role by receiving information from the marketer and transmitting it across to the opinion receivers or the opinion seekers. So, once the marketer will provide them the information about the product or service offerings, about the brands and then use them. So, one such people that is those people who have the potential, who have the characteristics, who have traits to become an opinion leader are exposed to a message, they would in turn talk about it and make job easier for a marketer.

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-According to Rogers, there are **four basic techniques** for measuring Opinion Leadership, viz.,

- i) the **self-designating method**;
- ii) the **sociometric method**;
- iii) the **key informant method**; and
- iv) the **objective method**.

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So, now let us talk about how what are the basic methods for measuring opinion leadership. Talking about the different measures, there is a person by the name of Rogers and Rogers came up with four basic techniques for measuring opinion leadership. The self-designating method, the sociometric method, the key informant method and the objective method.

So, the self designating method is where the marketing survey is conducted and people are asked series of question to determine the degree to which they behave as opinion leaders. So, they ask few questions about which basically study the degree or the intensity with which they have a potential to behave as or they do behave as opinion leaders. The questions could be like to what extent to which they have given information and advice about the product or brand to others in the social system, how often they have been able to influence others in the social group, how often they have been approached for information and advice about the particular product or service category and about the brand. So, such questions, answers to such questions will give an idea and to determine how people could behave as an opinion leader.

So, advantages of such of a method is that it is easy to flag in the market through market research questionnaires and it helps measure individuals perception and assessment about himself and his or her opinion leadership related capacities. These advantages is because it is based on self-assessment. It could lead to over estimation and then suffer from buyers. It is also difficult to assess the outcome of communication in terms of knowledge and advice. So, the success of this technique depends on the objectivity to which a consumer response to it and the objectivity with which it responds can identify assess and report his personal influence.

The second method which will measure opinion leadership is the sociometric method. This is self study of the social system and particularly the communication pattern enforce to identify **who is act who can act** who acts as an opinion leader. So, researchers examine the complete pattern of informal communication flows and identify those who provide information to others as an opinion leader. So, the advantages or the tests can, the technique we need the test of validity and reliability. The chances of misconception and buyers are much less, but the problem is it is difficult to implement. It is costly in terms of money and time and in order to obtain results that is valid and reliable, it requires a lot

of intensive and extensive data from a large amount of information from a large of amount of sample. So, this can be very expensive and time consuming.

In the key informant method, the key informant social system are identified based on the careful observation and analysis and these key informants are asked to identify and designate individuals in the social group who are opinion leaders or who are most likely to be the opinion leaders. So, the key informants here are asked to identify and designate the individuals in the social group who are opinion leaders or who are most likely to be opinion leaders. Now, in this way where the expert is asked to identify opinion leaders; that technique is better than the self designating method, that is whether the person is set to assess himself as the opinion leader. The advantages is this is relatively less time consuming and expensive as compared to sociometric method and it is based on chosen few rather than large samples, but the disadvantages is that if the informants are not carefully chosen, they may provide wrong information.

Finally, we come to the objective method which is based on stimulation. It identifies and measures opinion leadership by placing people in controlled environments just as you have controlled experiments. People are chosen and given information about the product and service category. These are asked to act as an opinion leader. So, the resulting web and pattern of informal interpersonal communication are traced and analyzed and very successfully able to understand who will be the opinion leader or who will not be. So, the advantages is that it measures person's ability to provide use and advice and enquire purchase decisions in a controlled environment, but of course it is a very complex process and very time consuming and here, we can see these particular method is suppose also from limitation because it is a very complex process.

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7.7.7 Traits and Characteristics of Opinion Leaders:

-An understanding of the traits and characteristics of Opinion Leaders is helpful to marketers so that they can target their marketing efforts, particularly their promotional efforts and their communication programme at all such consumers.

-Marketers assume that given their characteristics, the Opinion Leaders would indulge in WOM communication and spread product news, advice and experiences.

-They would successfully be able to influence consumption patterns and consumption behavior of others.

-Consumer researchers and market practitioners have successfully identified traits and characteristics of Opinion Leaders, and developed their profile.



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Now, let us come to the traits and characteristics of opinion leaders. Opinion leaders have or possess certain traits and characteristics.

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TRAITS AND CHARACTERISTICS:

i) Opinion leaders possess *high levels of involvement and interest in a specific product or service category.*


ii) They are *subject experts and have tremendous knowledge about the specific product or service category.*

iii) They are *product or service category specific*; a person who is an opinion leader in a particular product/service category would be an Opinion Receiver/Seeker for another.

iv) In most cases, Opinion Leaders are also *consumer innovators.*

v) Opinion Leaders also possess certain *personal characteristics*; by nature, they are *self-confident and gregarious.*

vi) As far as characteristics related to *social class* and social standing are concerned, *Opinion leaders generally belong to the same socioeconomic group as Opinion Receivers/Seekers.*



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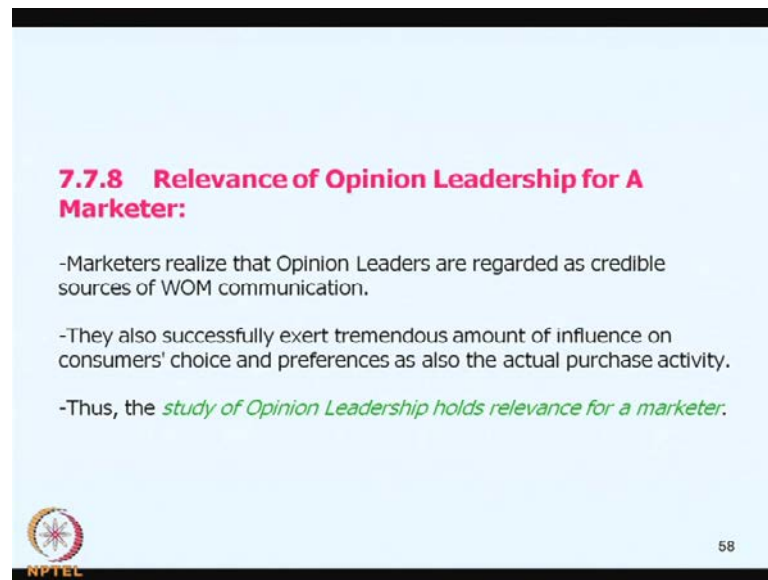
Let us talk about these traits. The first is that opinion leaders possess high level involvement and interest in a particular service or product or service category. They gather information from various sources and they are very updated about these information. They have greater interest or exposure to media. They like to hear and read

more about what interests them and this is something which is ongoing and very long term enduring involvement.

Second is they are the subject experts and they have tremendous knowledge about the product or service category. They are well informed about the product, various attributes and the service and its benefits and because of their knowledge, people turn to them for advice. They are also product and service category specific. We have spoken about how they are different from market mavens because more you know intensive about a particular product service called a category rather than being tense about everything and such people become opinion leaders for particular category and will become opinion receivers and seekers in other category.


In most cases, opinion leaders are also likely to be the innovators and because they act as innovators, because they inner directorate, because they act as innovators, they are the ones who are going to buy something, use it and also become the trend setter. So, they are also innovators and we will see, we will discuss in the next session when we talk about innovation as how opinion leaders act as big innovators. So, they have the first time experience with the product or service category. They buy something, use it and then they set the trend and then they also ask or provide advice based on their reaction, based on their satisfaction and dissatisfaction levels are based on their experience in the product category, they share it with others. Opinion leaders also have their personal characteristics by their personal nature. They are very self confident and they love to talk and they are exposed by nature and as far as the characteristic is concerned and social standing is concerned, generally they belong to the same social group as opinion receivers and opinion seekers. So, in terms of social standing, in terms of social status and social class, they are very similar.

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7.7.8 Relevance of Opinion Leadership for A Marketer:

- Marketers realize that Opinion Leaders are regarded as credible sources of WOM communication.
- They also successfully exert tremendous amount of influence on consumers' choice and preferences as also the actual purchase activity.
- Thus, the *study of Opinion Leadership holds relevance for a marketer.*

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Now, the opinion leadership process is relevant for marketer. Marketer realizes that opinion leaders are regarded as credible sources of word of mouth communication and that is why we have seen how they act as the vital link between the marketer and the consumer and the marketer once he is able to identify such an opinion leader, he can make his job easier by educating people or consumers, either prospects or current through the help of or with the help of an opinion leader.

So, they identify them and then share product related information with the opinion leader and opinion leader, they transmit same to the masses or to the public which they identify as information receiver or information seeker. So, it makes a job easier rather than the marketer, he directly acts, he uses as a link his opinion leader to transmit information. This is not to say that marketer will not deal directly with the consumer. Of course, he will have his own marketing channel of the communication and deal directly with the consumer as well, but as far as informal interpersonal communication is concerned and as far as relevance of word of mouth communication is concerned, they have been respecting the marketers preferably use in opinion leaders as vital link to transmit whatever they have to say to the consumers.


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FAQS (Frequently Asked Questions):

Ques 1 Discuss the Motives behind the Opinion Leadership Process.

Ques 2 Critically assess the various techniques used to measure Opinion Leadership.

Ques 3 Discuss the traits and characteristics of Opinion Leaders.

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This slide is titled 'FAQS (Frequently Asked Questions):' in pink. It lists three questions related to opinion leadership. The NPTEL logo is in the bottom left corner, and the slide number '63' is in the bottom right corner.

Now, this brings us to the conclusion of this session. We have these references.
Frequently asked questions. Question:


1. Discuss the motives behind the opinion leadership process.
2. Critically assess the various techniques used to measure opinion leadership.
3. Discuss the traits and characteristics of opinion leaders.

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Self Evaluation Tests/Quizzes :

Section A True/false:

1. Opinion Leaders are specific to a product or service category.
2. Opinion Leaders provide only negative information about a product/service category.
3. Sometimes a person may become an Opinion Receiver/Seeker for the same product also.
4. In most cases, Opinion Leaders are also consumer innovators.
5. Opinion leaders generally belong to the same socioeconomic group as Opinion Receivers/Seekers.

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This slide is titled 'Self Evaluation Tests/Quizzes :' in pink. It contains a section 'Section A True/false:' with five true/false questions. The NPTEL logo is in the bottom left corner, and the slide number '64' is in the bottom right corner.


Coming to the quiz. Section A true/false one.

1. Opinion leaders are specific to a product or service category. (True)
2. Opinion leaders provide only negative information about a product or service category. (False)
3. Sometimes a person may become an opinion receiver or seeker for the same product also. (True)
4. In most cases, opinion leaders are also consumer innovators. (True)
5. Opinion leaders generally belong to the same socioeconomic group as opinion receivers and seekers. (True)

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Section B **Fill up the blanks:**

1. _____ act as a vital link between the marketer and consumers.
2. Opinion Leaders are said to be performing the _____ role as they act as experts and authorities for a particular product category.
3. There are some people who seem to know about everything about the market and offer their advice about anything and everything. Such people are called _____.
4. The _____ method is based on simulation. It identifies and measures Opinion Leadership by placing people in controlled environments.

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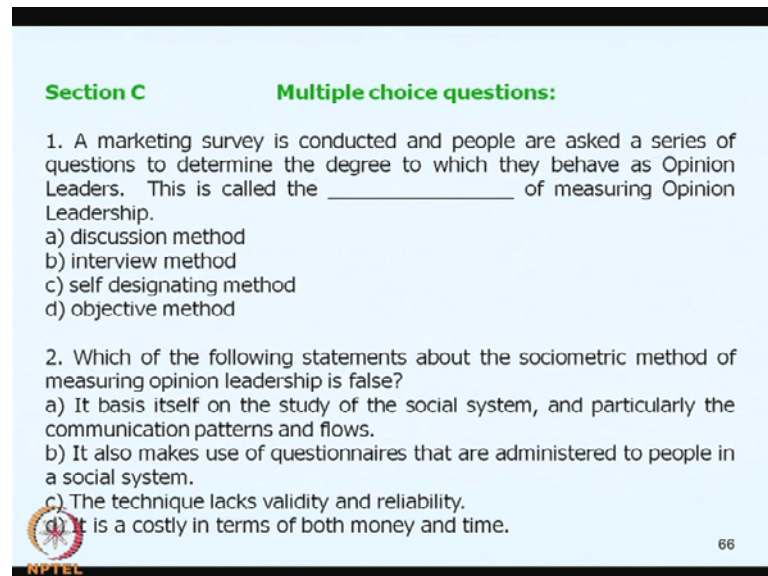
Fill in the blanks.

1. Dash act as a vital link between the marketer and consumers. (Opinion leaders)
2. Opinion leaders are said to be performing the dash role as they act as experts and authorities for a particular product category. (Authority figure)
3. There are some people who seem to know everything about the market and offer their advice about anything and everything. Such people are called dash. (Market mavens)

4. The dash method is based on simulation. It identifies and measures opinion leadership by placing people in controlled environments.

So, the answer to this is objective. The objective method is based on simulation.

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Section C **Multiple choice questions:**

1. A marketing survey is conducted and people are asked a series of questions to determine the degree to which they behave as Opinion Leaders. This is called the _____ of measuring Opinion Leadership.

- a) discussion method
- b) interview method
- c) self designating method
- d) objective method

2. Which of the following statements about the sociometric method of measuring opinion leadership is false?

- a) It basis itself on the study of the social system, and particularly the communication patterns and flows.
- b) It also makes use of questionnaires that are administered to people in a social system.
- c) The technique lacks validity and reliability.
- d) It is a costly in terms of both money and time.

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Multiple choice questions.

1. A marketing survey is conducted and people are asked a series of questions to determine the degree to which they behave as opinion leaders. This is called the dash of measuring opinion leadership. This is called

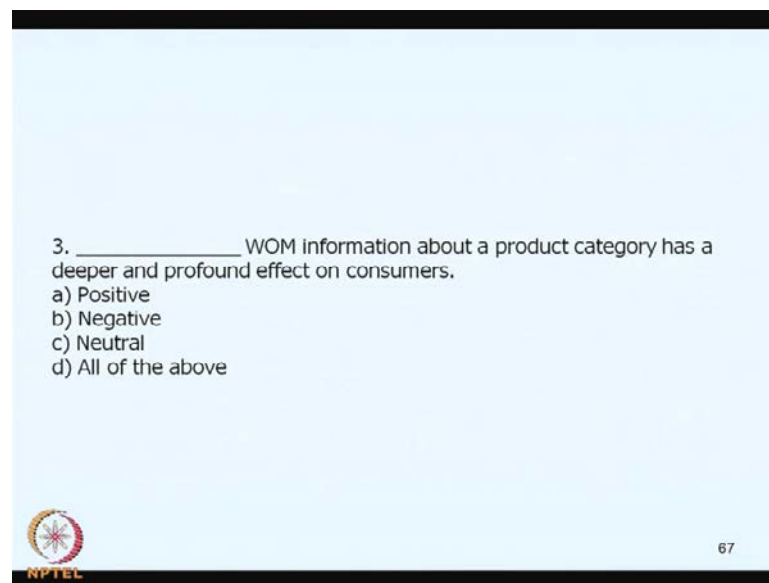
- a) Discussion method
- b) Interview method
- c) Self designating method
- d) Objective method

So, the answer is c. Self designating method.

2. Which of the following statements about the sociometric method of measuring opining leadership is false?

- a) It basis itself on the study of the social system, and particularly the communication patterns and flows.
- b) It also makes use of questionnaires that are administered to people in a social system.
- c) The technique lacks validity and reliability.
- d) It is costly in terms of both money and time. The answer is c. It is the false statement.

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The question number three.

Dash word of mode information about a product category has a deeper and profound effect on consumers.

- a) Positive
- b) Negative
- c) Neutral
- d) All of the above

The answer is negative.

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Section D **Short answers:**

1. Define Opinion Leadership.
2. Mention the three roles played by Opinion Leaders.
3. Explain briefly the key informant method of measuring Opinion Leadership.
4. Give instances how marketers can encourage Opinion Leadership through their marketing strategies.

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Short questions.


1. Define opinion leadership.
2. Mention the three roles played by opinion leaders. So, you have the three roles.
3. Explain briefly the key informant method of measuring opinion leadership, and
4. Give instances how marketers can encourage opinion leadership through their marketing strategies.

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3. Based on careful observation and analysis of social communication, key informants in a social system are identified. These key informants are those who are aware about the communication patterns in a social environment and able to provide a fair and impartial assessment of these patterns. These key informants are asked to identify and/or designate individuals in the social group who are Opinion Leaders or who are most likely to be Opinion Leaders. As a technique, it is relatively less expensive and time consuming. However, if informants are not carefully chosen, they may provide wrong information.

4. Marketers can encourage Opinion Leadership through their marketing strategies. Examples,

- through schemes like "share your experiences", "tell others that you like our brand", etc., marketers encourage consumers to discuss their experiences with others (eg. Electronic goods etc).
- through showing advertisements that portray product/service informal discussions about products/services amongst people (eg. health drinks, skin and hair care products etc.).



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So, this brings us to the conclusion of our session on the sociological influences of consumer decision making. We finish with our session on opinion leadership. We also finish the discussion on this particular module which was on sociological influence on consumer decision making. Now, in the next module, we will be talking about how new product that we use into the social system or into the marketing system and we will be discussing about diffusion of innovation.

Thank you.