

Voters' Behavior: What Drives Political Consumption in Cyprus? An Analysis of the Behavior of Young Voters



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Abstract Substantial corresponding has been established between politics, communication and marketing. Through the years there is application of consumer behaviour decision making to voter decision making; there is also parallel consideration of production and consumption of political communication and in particular pre-election period that has gained the interest of many scholars. Still this is an important research focus and a research gap upon the specific field. The electoral output in many national cases indicates that the attendance between young adults tends to be lower than in the general electorate, suggesting lower level of voting participation. In this manner, the paper attempts to measure the involvement of young adults in voting affairs and to investigate a parallel deliberation on the changing pattern of consumption of political communication. Data have been collected from structured questionnaire that conducted with a sample of 160 young adults from all over Cyprus. Accordingly, the actual impact of the campaigns might differ from the impact as this is appreciated by the participants, a fact that it suggests that future research, may consider the use of another tool, which is likely to give a more accurate measurement of the “Impact” of the pre-election campaigns.

Keywords Production/consumption of political communication · Voting behaviour · Pre-election campaigns

1 Introduction

Many similarities have been documented between politics communication and marketing. Through the years there is relevance of consumer behaviour decision making to voter decision making; there is also a parallel deliberation of production and consumption of political communication and in particular pre-election period

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that has gained the interest of many scholars. Therefore, this insists an important research focus and a research gap upon the specific field. Results from general elections around the world show that the attendance between young adults tends to be lower than in the general electorate, suggesting low interest and involvement in politics, and therefore lower level of voting participation. This paper central aim is to evaluate the participation of young adults in voting affairs and to examine the criteria of voting of young voters in Cyprus, as well as to consider a corresponding reflection on the changing pattern of production and consumption of political communication [1].

2 Literature Review

The aforementioned research aim and objectives derive from the fact that the electoral case of Cyprus as this is reported by previous national and local elections and is illustrated by previous research [2], indicates a declined level of participation, which may suggest a change in social trends and therefore the impact of communicational campaigns over the voter, is changing. More specifically the level of abstention in presidential elections is gradually increased from around 9% in the elections of 2003 and 2008, to 16.86% in 2013 and 28.12% at the first and second round of 2018 presidential elections respectively a fact that may suggest a changing electoral environment and thus is generating the need for further study the voting behaviour of younger generations of voters, which, more or less are determine the voting behaviour nowadays has been changed significantly.

2.1 *The Changing Environment and Its Impact Upon Political Communication*

The changing social environment and the changing social trends have their impact upon the function of political communication and therefore are directly linked to the scope of the study. According to Blumler and Kavanagh [1], the recent trends and the relations of social change to media change are multifaceted and mutual. Over the post-war period, political communication has been responsive (though also contributory) to the following series of exogenous/eternal change:

Modernization—that is, increased social differentiation and specialisation, fragmenting social organization, interests, and identities; proliferating diverse lifestyles and moral stances; and fuelling identity politics [3–5]. This complicates tasks of political aggregation and communication, supports markets for minority media, and may explain the appeal of talkshow explorations of divergent personal and sexual behaviours, conflicts, and aberrations.

Individualization—[1], implemented the elevation of personal aspirations, consumerism, and reduced conformity to the traditions and demands of established institutions, markedly political parties, the nuclear family, mainstream religion, the workplace, and neighbourhood and social-class groupings. In approaches to politics, citizens have become more like consumers (instrumental, oriented to immediate gratifications, and potentially fickle) than believers. Accordingly, politicians must work harder to maintain their interest and support.

Secularization—the notion of **Secularization** [1], concerning the loss of institutional avenues to the sacred and the reduced status of official politics, reflected initially in weaker party identifications but spreading subsequently to most other facets of political authority. The diminished parties face increased competition for media and public attention from the rise of hard-lobbying interest and cause groups. Relations of elites to masses are transformed by the evaporation of deference and increased scepticism about the credentials, claims, and credibility of authority holders in many walks of life.

Economization—the increasing influence of economic factors and values on the political agenda and other areas of society, including culture, arts, and sports [6]. The subordination of formerly more autonomous spheres (e.g., higher education, publishing and journalism) to economic criteria of performance is encouraged.

Aestheticization—in Ulrich Beck's [7] sense of people's increased preoccupation with stylishness, image, presentation, and appropriate tastes, especially in fashion and music. This encourages closer associations of politics with popular culture [8].

Increasing rationalization of all facets of purposive organization and administration. This favours argument backed by systematically gathered evidence in forums of relatively sustained policy debate (conferences, quality press, signed columns, specialist political programs, analytical journalism, weekly magazines of news and comment). Policymakers, think tanks, and pressure groups are encouraged to commission pragmatically oriented research, strengthening the hands of experts whose claims to be able to conduct and interpret it are widely accepted. But it also supports the emergence of "the instrumental rationalization of persuasion," based on the techniques, values, and personnel of (a) advertising, (b) market research, and (c) public relations [9].

"Mediatization" [1] the media moving toward the centre of the social process. This promotes the concept and practices of a "media-constructed public sphere," inspiring the communication function and the role of communication experts in a wide range of institutions.

The highlighting of aforementioned notions, which refer to the trends and the tendencies of the social environment in which political communication is performed, it might be relevant to the scope of the study. Accordingly, those notions are influencing and shaping the environment in which electoral campaigns are produced and taking place, and in the same manner, they might influence way in which those campaigns are consumed by the voter.

2.2 *Uses and Gratifications*

Another basic notion that we consider as relevant to the scope of the study, is what mass communication researchers today refer to as the uses and gratifications (U&G) approach is generally documented to be a subtradition of media effects research [10], and is directly linked to the notions of production and consumption of political communication that concern the proposed study. Until the 1970s, U&G research concentrated on gratifications sought, excluding outcomes, or gratifications obtained [11]. During the 1970s, U&G researchers intently examined audience motivations and developed additional typologies of the uses people made of the media to gratify social and psychological needs. Another vital suggestion that is foundational to the uses-and-gratifications approach is that audiences can gratify their needs in a variety of ways using both media and nonmedia sources such as family and friends. These alternative sources are in competition with each other as potential sources of audience need gratifications [10].

2.3 *Agenda Setting, Priming and Framing*

Accordingly, as the major scope of the study partly deals with the consumption of political communication and the consumption of political campaigns, it has been considered as essential to make a reference to the political/cognitive effects of a pre-electoral campaign and in particular the notions of agenda setting, priming and framing. Electoral campaigns are the competitive efforts by candidates and political parties to win voter support in the period preceding an election. Candidates use a variety of techniques to reach the voters, from public appearances and rallies to the use of mass media advertising. Campaigning for public office is usually done for a longer period than the 'official' campaign period specified in the electoral calendar, when candidates may receive special treatment, usually in the form of access to public media or public funds for campaign purposes [12–15].

3 *Methodology and Data Analysis*

In order to respond to the basic research questions of the proposed research issue and to facilitate the accomplishment of its central research aim, it has been considered as essential to deploy some quantitative research in favor of the gathering of some related data. More specifically, the selected research methodology, involved the deployment of a basic statistical analysis, which assisted in the measurement of the voting behavior and the attitudes of the research population, as well as the illustration of their electoral perceptions and their anticipation and reactions against

electoral communication campaigns, as they reported by the survey that took place in August 2018, for the purpose of the specific paper.

3.1 Research Population and Sample

The population of the proposed research was composed by the total of Cypriot young adults, who are eligible to vote for national, European and Local Elections. Moreover, the questionnaire has been given randomly to—young adults (Males and Females) from all over Cyprus, within the wider age group of 18–35 and approximately was composed 70% from the urban areas and 30% from Countryside of the Republic of Cyprus). The final sample of 160 interviewees has been selected on a stratified random basis by considering the geographical spread of the population (Approximately 30% from Nicosia, 25% from Limassol, 20% from Larnaca, 18% from Pafos and 10% from Famagusta area, as well as the wider demographic illustration of the research population and the three age groups. A stratified random sampling engages dividing the total population into uniformed groups which are called strata (singular is stratum). A random sample from each stratum is taken in a number proportional to the stratum's size when compared to the population. These subsets of the strata are then pooled to form a random sample. When a sampling pattern is appropriately represented by all subpopulations in the sample, then it is possible to achieve a smaller dispersion for population parameter estimates than we have from a simple random sample of the same size that does not take into account the probability of discrimination of the population in subpopulations. Moreover, in order to obtain a clearer representation, the chosen sample was stratified almost equally into three more specific age groups: —20, 20–30, and 30–35, in order to thoroughly examine the political and voting perceptions and the tenancies of young adults in different stages of their young adulthood.

Questionnaire Structure The design of the method has been accomplished by the deployment of a structured questionnaire comprised by nine basic questions relevant to the political involvement, the voting attitude and the perceptions against political campaign, as well as the gathering of the basic demographic data, which assisted the accomplishment of an effective and representative sampling. The eight out of the nine questions have been structured and rated with the use of Likert [16]—Style rating.

3.2 Data Analysis

At the first question the interviewees have been invited to declare the extend to wich they considered as essential their involvment in publc affairs. The answers where varying al over the five point scale, with the vast majority to state that they consider as essential a moderate to hich level of invovment in publc affairs. In a similar way,

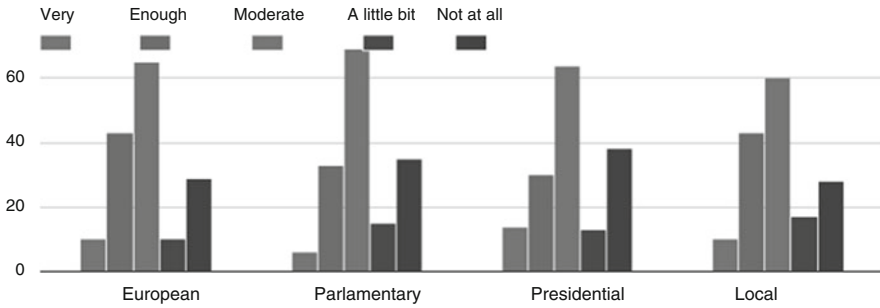


Fig. 1 How trustworthy/representative of the political positions of parties or candidates (generally acknowledged) are their electoral communication campaigns?

when the participants have been requested to state the extent to which they consider their participation in the right to vote, the vast majority (approximately 90%) was spread from the middle to the “right end” of the rating scale, while only the 10%, considered their participation as either completely unimportant, or a little bit important. However, when the interviewees requested to declare the extent to which they considered their participation in the right to stand for election, their response was speared all over the rating scale. Moreover, when the respondents have been asked to state whether they have voted in political elections at local, regional, national or European level, the vast majority stated “Yes” for all the levels of elections, with the Presidential elections, to have the greatest number of positive answers and the European elections the smallest, however 75 interviewees (almost have of them) still answered “Yes”. Furthermore, when the participants have been invited to declare how trustworthy/representative of the political positions of parties or candidates did they considered communication/campaign campaigns (see Fig. 1), their answers were speared all over the scale, however the majority of the interviewees stated a moderate level of trustworthiness for every single level of electoral communication campaigns.

When the interviewees have been asked to state the extent to which they think that their participation or non-participation (as a voter) has been affected, from the communication/election campaigns, again the answers were spread all over the scale), in a similar way for every single level of elections (European, Parliamentary, Presidential and Local), while the vast majority of the respondents has replied either “Moderate” or “Not at all”. In a similar manner, when the respondents have been requested to state what kind of impact did they believe that the electoral campaigns of the parties or candidates, had upon their electoral perceptions/aspirations (generally acknowledged), the vast majority answered “Neither positive nor negative”. Additionally, when the interviewees asked to state the extent to which this impact (impact from election campaigns) has affected their final voting decision/choice, their answers where spread all over the scale, while the vast majority was speared between “Moderate” and “Not at all”. On the other hand though, when the respondents have been requested to declare the first criterion upon which will they give

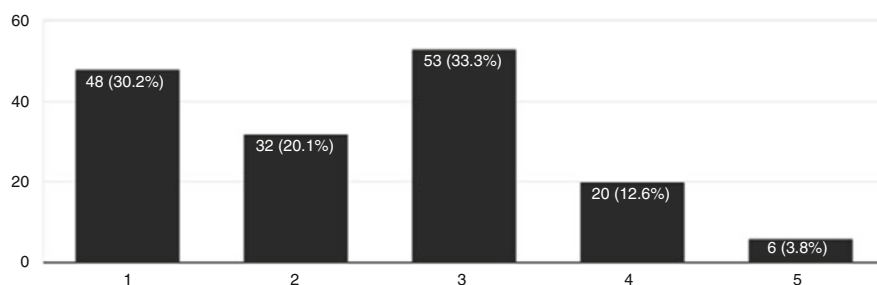


Fig. 2 To what extent have the election campaigns of the parties or candidates influenced/shaped your voting criterion?

their vote, their answers were varying according to the level and the nature of the elections. Finally, at the last basic question of the survey, where the interviewees have been asked to claim the extent to which the election campaigns had influenced/shaped their voting criterion, the vast majority placed their answer from the left end, to the middle of the scale. More specifically, 30.2%, answered “Not at all” (1), 20.1%, “A little bit” (2) and 33.3%, “Moderately” (3), while only the 12.6 and the 3.8% respectively, replied “Enough” (4) and “Very” (5) (see Fig. 2).

4 Discussion Upon Data Analysis

It might be essential to proceed to a further discussion upon the specific findings, in order to further support the accomplishment of the research aim. In this manner the following sub-sections attempt to formulate a discussion of highlighting the basic research outcomes, as well as by stressing some related limitations and recommendations. As it has already been mentioned, the primary research purpose of the project was dealing with the production and consumption of political communication in relation to the voting behaviour of young Cypriot adults. Moreover, the way in which the communication mix of a political party or a candidate, is consumed by the voters, illustrates the criteria upon which they are voting, this fact comprises the other vital parameter measured by the given survey. The specific research illustrates that the voting criteria of Cypriot young adults is varying according to the level and the kind of elections. More specifically the proposed research makes an attempt of clarifying the pure relation between the positions produced by the parties and the ideological/political desires perceived and consumed by the voters both in local, state and European level. An important finding that is illustrated by this specific point, is the fact that in general lines the criterion of the average young voter, as it is reflected by the current research, appears to be healthier from the national average, since it does not reflect the “Customer oriented” relationship that dominates between the Cypriot Voter [16, 17] and the Political Parties. Therefore, the specific statement might indicate that the younger generation of Cypriots moves away from

the present “pathogenicity” of the Cypriot society [2, 18]. The level of involvement of young adults in public and more specifically in voting affairs, formulates the first fundamental factor that is measured by the given survey. More specifically, the first three questions of the survey indented to examine the level in which young are involved in public affairs, as well to overview the importance of voting among the research population, as well as to examine their participation in voting/electoral activity. Moreover, the first question indicates that by their vast majority the young Cypriots consider as essential a moderate to high level of involvement in public affairs. This is ensured and by the fact, their vast majority (approximately 90%) was spread from the middle to the “right end” of the rating scale, which is translated that they consider voting as relatively important. In addition, the aforementioned facts are confirmed by the actual illustration of the importance of voting activity, as it is illustrated by the second question, where the vast majority of the respondents appeared to consider the participation in voting as very important. However, this finding is not highly reflected by the actual participation in various levels of elections, as this is illustrated by the third question. The difference of those to findings (the appreciation of the importance of voting activity and the actual reflection of voting), indicates that the young adults understand the importance of voting, however, their absence of participation to a certain extent is, either a result of disproving the political system, or a result of the general appreciation that their vote will not manage to change the present situation [12]. The impact that the communication campaigns of the parties or the candidates may have upon young adults voting behaviour sets the second basic factor that is measured by the given survey. More specifically, questions four to seven of the given questionnaires are dealing with the measurement of the impact and trustworthy/representativeness of the communication campaign, upon young adult voters’ perceptions. However, as it is clearly reflected by the proposed survey, the vast majority placed their answer from the left end, to the middle of the scale, a fact that indicates that the average appreciation of the Cypriots young adult is that they are not influenced by the communicational campaigns of the parties or the candidates. However, this may reflect the fact that the so called “Impact” is not understood and perceived correctly and coherently.

5 Suggestions and Recommendations

The fact that the “Impact” is not perceived coherently reflects a limitation of the research. Therefore, the actual “Impact” of the communication campaigns might differ from the “Impact” as this is appreciated by the participants, a fact that it suggests that future research, may consider the use of another tool (e.g. Focus Group), which it is likely to give a more accurate and objective measurement of the “Impact” of the pre-election campaigns”. The aspect of political clarity and consistency thought a pre-election period; it could formulate a helpful tool in anticipating further research, therefore it is suggested that future research may find

the way to measure the level of the political clarity of campaigns. Finally, the contrast between some major findings of the survey, may suggest that a future research may consider using research tools that will manage to examine the aforementioned aspect more consistently.

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