Exploring Young Voter Engagement and Journey Mapping across Political Events

Journal:	*International Journal of Market Research*
Manuscript ID	MRE-22-0061.R1
Manuscript Type:	Article
Keywords:	Voter engagement, Voter journey, Voter experience, Political marketing, Strategic segmentation
Main Category:	Public opinion research/polling
Theme:	Qualitative methods
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Young Voters' Engagement: A Customer Journeys Perspective

Abstract

This interdisciplinary study aims to explore the lived experiences and engagement of young voters from a customer journey perspective. To achieve this, the present study investigates voter engagement journey with various political events (2015 UK General Election, 2016 UK-EU Referendum, 2017 UK General Election and future elections). The authors collected data via phenomenological in-depth interviews with young voters 18-24 years. The results show different engagement journeys and touchpoints. In particular, the findings reveal that 1) young voters were not apathetic of politics as long as they could identify the personal impact of political issues-policies (i.e. sticky customer journey); 2) the 'voter journey' is dynamic resulting in stronger engagement yet limited long-term party loyalty; and 3) voters used multiple touchpoints to engage with the political process combining media, voter-led research and interactions with personal networks and political stakeholders (online and off-line). This study puts forward the voter engagement and journey mapping framework which represents a mechanism for researchers and practitioners to gain access into the hidden world of the voter journey and periodically explore levels of engagement across political events. To our knowledge, this is the first study examining customer journeys in a political context and provides insights for political campaign managers to effectively improve voters' engagement.

*Keywords***:** Customer journeys, touchpoints, voter engagement, voter experience, political marketing, Brexit, political activities-tactics

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Introduction

Despite it being emphasised that voters' experience is a key factor for political parties to win the elections (Pickard 2019; Sloam and Henn 2017), voter customer journeys, as an important pillar of this approach, has received little attention from scholars. Moving toward the strategic marketing era, scholars need to use customer journeys to understand a variety of contexts (Becker et al. 2020), including political marketing. Due to the high volatility of voters (Simons 2016), the need to grasp how they engage with political events (e.g. Lees-Mashment, 2019) and their (dis)engagement with the political process (Pickart 2019), exploring their voting customer journeys is of paramount importance for political stakeholders. As online marketing expenditures continue to grow, understanding how to allocate resources across various touchpoints requires an in-depth account of how customers interact with these resources throughout their customer journey (Li et al. 2020) to create a strong customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef 2016).

Responding to the identified gaps, we adopt an interdisciplinary approach combining theory from political marketing, customer journeys and consumer engagement to highlight the need to understand young voters' engagement experience. Particularly, this study seeks to 1) understand voter engagement journeys across political events and future voting intentions, 2) identify touchpoints in voters' engagement journey, 3) develop a systematic framework to explore voter engagement journeys and identify changes overtime. This study also responds to calls for research on customer journeys to explore customer experiences in different contexts from commercial products and services (Becker et al., 2020). In the *first* section, we critically discuss the theoretical background for this study. The *second* part presents our research objectives offers an overview of the research context of political uncertainty and puts forward an appropriate and justified methodology, while the *third* section presents and discusses our empirical findings structured via three theoretical constructs-themes emergent from our observations linked with previous research. The *final* part outlines the implications of our research for marketers and academics and conclude with the identification of areas for future research.

Theoretical background

The theoretical background of this work is organised around *political marketing*, to follow with the literature on voter engagement. The fourth sub-chapter focuses on *customer journeys* and how they can help to enhance individuals' experiences. The final sub-section brings together the three abovementioned areas to indicate the need to investigate *young voter's engagement journey through different political events*.

Political Marketing

There is a general agreement among scholars that both political marketing and marketing share similar theoretical concepts and application. Political marketing has developed over the last twenty years as a recognised sub-discipline of marketing which focuses on the application of marketing strategy, research practices, management and communication tactics-tools to the political environment (Lees-Marshment, 2019). Political marketing aims "*to create, communicate, deliver and exchange promises of value with voter-consumers, political party stakeholders and society at large*" (Hughes and Dann, 2009, p. 244). Politicians, advisors, parties, movements, governments and nations use marketing strategy to help them achieve a

wide range of goals, from winning elections to achieving policy change (Billard, 2018; Harris and Lock, 2010; Kornum and Muhlbacker, 2013; Lees-Marshment, 2019; Parackal et al. 2018). The application of marketing strategies, techniques, concepts and tools in politics is also known as a 'marketisation' of politics (Savigny and Wring, 2009) and the way in which these approaches have been used shows the orientation of a political party.

Existing research in political marketing recognises that political stakeholders such as political parties or politicians, periodically conduct market research to understand the wants and needs of the electorate. This helps them to develop appropriate messages (Johnston et al. 2018; Lin 2017; Parackal et al. 2018; Wilson and Paleologos 2018), and further engage with voters, who are part of the co-creation of the election process. In "*recent years there has been an increased level of voter volatility which has been matched by an interest in understanding electoral behaviour*" (Simons 2016, p.4). Understanding how people behave in political events, how they engage with political tactics and capturing their experiences of the political process is an area that requires further discussion (Johnston et al. 2018; Lees-Marshment, 2019; Lees-Marshment *et al*. 2019; Lin 2017; Nunan and Domenico 2019; Parackal et al. 2018; Walker *et al.* 2019; Wilson and Paleologos 2018).

Voter Engagement and Disengagement

Voter engagement is a complex, paradoxical phenomenon (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014; Dermody et al. 2010; Gorecki 2013; Pickard 2019; Uberoi and Johnston 2021). The notion of voter engagement can trace its origins to the 1960s where researchers focused on the political 'activity' of citizens in elections and political events (Russell et al. 2002). Since then, voter engagement has expanded across disciplines including politics, education, sociology and marketing (Pickard 2019). Further, research on voter engagement has become specialised and sophisticated in terms of conceptualisation, measurement and exploration. For example, an engaged voter can be defined as an individual or group and "*can be considered democratically [politically] engaged to the extent that he/she (it) is positively engaged behaviourally and psychologically with the political system and associated democratic norms*" (Uberoi and Johnston 2021 p6). In contrast, a voter can be disengaged "*if they do not know, value or participate in the democratic process*" (Uberoi and Johnston 2021 p4). This suggests that engagement and disengagement are related yet distinct concepts. Nevertheless, investigating whether citizens are engaged or disengaged remains a key concern for political parties, institutions, and governments across national and international contexts as engagement and disengagement has an impact on the democratic process (Johnson and Marshall 2004; Pickard 2019).

Indeed, engagement and disengagement of young people and politics has been well documented in the past (Johnson and Marshall 2004; Russell et al. 2002; Sloam, and Henn 2017; Uberoi and Johnston; 2021). Of all voter groups, young people are often portrayed as "highly distrusting", "cynical", "alienated" of the political process (Dermody et al. 2010, p.421). Further, young people are less likely to turn out and take part in the political process compared with the general population (Johnson and Marshall 2004; Pontes et al. 2019; Russell et al. 2002). For example, 54% of 18–24-year-olds turned out to vote in the 2019 UK General Election compared to 77% of over 65-year-olds. In addition, young people with fewer qualifications are less likely to register than those educated to a degree level (Electoral commission Study 2016) and young people are most likely of all groups to complain that limited information is disseminated about political events, campaigns, candidates and policies (Russell et al. 2002). Nevertheless, research suggests that young people continue to call for

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clearer and detailed information prior elections and political events (Harrison 2020; Johnson and Marshall 2004; Russell et al. 2002), which in turn could strengthen engagement and improve the voter experience. Therefore, young people appear to be interested in political issues (Kyroglou, 2020), however feel ignored and perceive that politicians and establishment have little interest and regard in the wants and needs of young people (Birdwell et al. 2014).

According to The Electoral Commission and researchers, 'apathy' is not the problem and cynicism relate to the political process, institutions, and political parties rather than personal interest in political issues (Johnson and Marshall 2004; Sloam and Henn 2017). Indeed, studies carried out over the last twenty years continue to argue that to strengthen engagement, researchers need to investigate the experiences and behaviours of young people in more detail and ensure young people understand the relevance and impact of politics (Johnson and Marshall 2004; Sloam, and Henn 2017). However, despite that young people are often portrayed as apathetic with politics, young people are becoming increasingly 'active' in elections and political events (Kyroglou 2020). Further, "*young people's political participation is increasing and diversifying*" (Pickard 2019 p.50). Understanding the engagement [or disengagement] of young people is important as research suggests that "*a person's first electoral experience might colour their entire career as a voter (or non-voter)*" (Russell et al. 2002 p.7). This is consistent with Harrison (2020 p.259) who maintains that 'turnout in one of the first two elections when a citizen is eligible to vote will shape their political participation for years to come'. In addition, young people aged 18-24 years are "*mostly voting in their first national election…and, since young people are most open change at this point in their lives and electoral participation is known to be habit-forming, we consider this to be the most significant stage in an individual's formal political development. It is at which an individual's decision to vote and to support a particular political party are most likely to have a lasting impact*" (Sloam and Henn 2017 p.9). Therefore, exploring how young people engage in elections and politic events is crucial as this could have an impact on future engagement by improving voter turnout and identifying strategies and tactics to strengthen the democratic process. This in turn addresses explicit calls for further research on the complex and paradoxical phenomenon of voter engagement (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014; Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd 2004; Dermody et al. 2010; Dermody et al. 2010; Gorecki 2013; Harrison 2020; Russell et al. 2002).

Voter Engagement: A Multi-dimensional Construct

The concept of engagement, as a multi-dimensional construct (Bowden et al. 2017) comprising three key dimensions: *cognitive* (a set of enduring and active mental states experienced by the consumer), *emotional* (summative and enduring level of emotions experienced by a consumer with respect to his or her engagement focus) and *behavioural* (behavioural manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers) (Hollebeek et al., 2019). While some studies considered both conventional and non-conventional actions, they focused only on the behavioural aspect of engagement (Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014), measured as 'voter turnout' (i.e. 'the portion of voting-eligible citizen who vote'). This measure is an important factor for the government future decisions as it acts like a reinforce assessment from a citizen's perspective (Lang and Witts, 2018; Shawky et al. 2022). However, the major shortcoming of this measure is to be too simple. It does not tell the whole story of citizen's participation with a political event such as elections.

Recently political marketing research explored the cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions of voter engagement; defined as "*an individual voter's degree of political event-related thought processing and elaboration, emotions and actual devotion of energy, effort, and time to a political event*" (Pich *et al.* 2018, p.6). This study suggests a new voters' typology comprising seven prototypical engagement personas (i.e. responsive, latent, cynical, disaffected, instinctive, reluctant and floating), each of them capturing a different type of political engagement. See figure 1 for a summary of the organisation and characteristics of each engagement level.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

This typology provides a strategic tool for voter classification and suggests that "*voter engagement [is] a dynamic process which changes through time as voters change their level-degree of engagement from election to election*" (Pich et al. 2018, p.19). However, Pich et al. (2018) focused on a single political event and neglected the exploration of the voter journey overtime. Further, the typology seems to ignore a relatively large group of citizens who do not express any types of engagement and can be classified as 'disengaged'. Disengaged individuals are an important group of people who might presently show no engagement in political events, but they might become interested or show some degree of engagement in the future. Voters might exhibit different degree of engagement in various political events. Extant research shows that citizens do not maintain the same persona in different elections (Lang and Witts, 2018; Shawky et al. 2022). By adopting the engagement typology and study of several political events, the changes and underlying motivations for the changes can be investigated. This specifically responds to the call by Pich et al. (2018, P.19) that there is a need to explore the changes in the degree of engagement and the reason behind these changes. Recent research suggests that "*engagement becomes a part of the overall customer experience and, in its specific manifestations, constitutes specific touchpoints along the customer journey*" (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p.74). At the same time, the concept of engagement (Brodie et al., 2011) is the best way to study prior brand relationships and predict touchpoints (Baxendale et al., 2015).

Customer Journeys

Due to recent technological advancements, the concepts of 'consumer journeys' and 'consumer experiences' have both gained the great attention of scholars and practitioners in the marketing discipline (e.g. Kuehnl, Jozic and Homburg, 2019). Consumers have access to a number of online and offline touchpoints to interact with providers of products and services (Chheda et al. 2019) and individualise their journey (Barwitz and Maas 2018) contributing to their overall experience. In a customer journey analysis, firms focus on how customers interact with multiple touch points, moving from consideration, search, and purchase to post-purchase, consumption, and future engagement (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016).

Research in this area has looked at a range of online actions to show the effect on the internet use on political engagement as well as measuring attempting to measure online and offline engagement (Gibson and Cantijoch 2013; Saglie and Vabo 2009; Hollenbeck and Kaikati 2012). However, these studies have focused on single campaigns. In addition, little research traces how young voters behave with the political process and engage with political tactics-activities particularly through time (Akaka and Schau 2019; Peter and Honea 2012), especially as the voter embarks on a personal 'journey' across different political events.

Recent research highlights that when customers travel from one decision to another, they rarely do so alone, thus 'social others' or 'travelling companions' should be considered in this journey because individually or in agreement they can influence and individual's decision journey, for example indicating how satisfaction in a journey can change how they see companions in the next journey, and how individuals cope with social information impacting their decisions (Hamilton et al., 2021). Customer journeys involve multiple service cycles (e.g. visiting the same restaurant regularly) and much of this research assumes that consumers follow 'smooth journeys', reflecting customers wanting a task to be completed in the most effective and predictable way to drive loyalty (Siebert et al., 2020). Other consumers follow "sticky journeys" which "*are exciting journeys that customer yearn to continue*" and more associated with adventure and entertainment (Siebert et al., 2020, p.46). This alternative journey highlights the need to conduct research showing a less linear and more complex approach that addresses new possible journey expansion pathways, for example by identifying new ways in which consumers conduct research, or a holistic understanding on how consumer experiences (Mele and Ruso-Spena, 2021). The political context of young voters' engagement lends itself to explore new customer journey pathways. Understanding customer experience and the customer journey over time is critical for firms to capture the complexity of individuals' behaviour and create a strong customer experience (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). In the same way organisations risk losing customers unless they ensure a seamless interaction throughout the customer journey (Singh, 2021), political stakeholders need to understand the complexity of the voter behaviour towards political events (Peng and Hackley, 2009).

Young Voters' Engagement Journey Through Different Political Events

This study draws on the concept of consumer journeys to explore young voters' journey through various political events. Three observations from review of marketing literature are underpinning this study: (a) 'Voter journey' should be investigated from a holistic approach in which voters' interactions with both online and offline politics related touchpoints are considered. From a political campaign management perspective, understanding of the 'voter journey' will give the better picture of voters' interaction with multiple political touchpoints and how these touchpoints might contribute to their voting behaviour. Advances in information and communications technologies have altered relationships among political candidates, media, voters and citizens (Lin and Himelboim 2018). Acquiring support online by having people liking, sharing their political affiliation visible to their network is important for political parties and politicians (Archer-Brown et al. 2017); (b) 'Young voters' are not using the advanced technologies only to fulfil their personal needs but also to communicate with other voters to create greater value for them. From a political marketing perspective, it emphasises the need for appropriate marketing actions to create value for young voters who are co-producers of political activities. And (c) There is a need to study how young voters might change their type of engagement due to changes in their goals. "*The customer journey can be both looping and nonlinear in nature and involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioural responses*" (Grenwal and Roggeveen, 2020, p. 3). The investigation of voters' goals through their journey will provide important insights for political parties to build a stronger relationship with them.

This represents an under-developed area of study on how young voters might change their type of engagement due to changes in their goals. The investigation of voters' goals through their journey and touchpoints will provide important insights for political parties to build a stronger relationship with them. Research in this area has looked at a range of online actions to show

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the effect on the internet use on political engagement as well as measuring attempting to measure online and offline engagement (Gibson and Cantijoch 2013; Saglie and Vabo 2009; Hollenbeck and Kaikati 2012). However, these studies have focused on single campaigns. In addition, little research traces how young voters behave with the political process and engage with political tactics-activities particularly through time (Akaka and Schau 2019; Peter and Honea 2012), especially as the voter embarks on a personal 'journey' across different political events. The aforementioned observations regarding voters' behaviour-engagement are important for political campaign managers to effectively implement political communication strategies and optimising budget allocation (Abdennadher *et al.* 2019). Marketers need to know which parts of the customer journey have most impact on attitudes and behaviours, and which of these crucial encounters are not working well (Baxendale et al., 2015). In summary, this study adopts the engagement typology (Pich et al., 2018) and employs phenomenological in-depth interviews to explore young voters' engagement journey and touchpoints through multiple political events.

Research Design

The present research examines young voters' journeys focusing on their engagement with political events and aiming to address three key research objectives:

- To understand young voter engagement journeys across political events and future voting intentions.
- To identify key touchpoints in voter engagement journey.
- To develop a systematic framework to explore voter engagement journeys and identify changes overtime

We focus on the volatile political context the UK and adopt a qualitative interpretive approach based on phenomenological in-depth interviews with young voters to inquire about their engagement journey overtime with the major political events in the UK and their future voting intentions.

Research Context

Researchers in the area of marketing encourage research in this time of uncertainty for many current governments due to lack of trust and political division (Wiener *et al.* 2018). The uncertainty in the current political context in the UK (Cumming and Zahra 2016) and variability in voters' engagement after the 2016 Referendum (Pich *et al.* 2018) suggests that this is a fertile context to inquire about the engagement journey of young voters over different political elections. An examination of current political events from a consumer research perspective can uncover new insights to explain "*seemingly senseless outcomes*" of behavior such as the unexpected outcome of Brexit, which people perceived to be against people's self-interests (Dahl *et al.* 2017, p. 722).

We use the under-research area of *consumption journeys*, which evolve overtime, have an element of progression and "*explore extended engagement with a particular practice*" (Akaka and Schau, 2019 p.499). Specifically, our study explores how young voters' engagement journey unfolds throughout the major political events in the UK by exploring young voter's stories.

Research Approach

We use a qualitative interpretive approach "*particularly well-suited for research that aims to discover new and complex phenomena within a social context, capturing informants' emic perspectives*" (Miles and Huberman 1994; Vredeveld and Coulter 2019, p.276). Phenomenological in-depth interviews were deemed suitable methods to explore voters' experiences with specific political events (e.g. 2016 EU Referendum, 2017 General Election), as they investigate topic areas "*described from a first-person view*" and emergent from the context where they were embedded (Bardey et al. 2022; Kenyon 2004; Thomson *et al.* 1989, p. 137). Recent research adopted a phenomenological perspective to the study consumer journeys (Vredeveld and Coulter 2019) and emphasized the relevance of this approach to expand existing research (Akaka and Schau 2019). We used interviews as one of the most powerful ways to gather an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences (Kvale 1983).

Interviews began by explaining participants the research process and inquired about their general views on politics and background information such as their constituency. This approach helped to know participants, build rapport and get to "*understand how and why they do things*" (Arsel, 2017 p. 942). Following this, interviewees were encouraged to reflect on their experiences around the most recent political events in the UK, including the 2015 General Election, 2016 EU Referendum and 2017 General Election to capture their engagement voting journey. We adopted this approach for two main reasons. First, reflexivity drives practice continuity and provides opportunities for enhanced consumption experiences overtime (Akaka and Shau 2019; Bardey et al. 2022), for example voting. By focusing on specific (political) events, the interviewer provided informants with a context that enabled them to describe the experience in detail (Thomson *et al.* 1989). Second, engagement "*is based on the existence of focal interactive customer experiences with specific engagement objects (e.g. a brand)*" (Brodie *et al.* 2011, p. 257) and in this case the object of engagement was a concrete political event (e.g. 2017 General Election). Consistently, in our interview guideline we embedded questions to capture elements of cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement with the abovementioned incidents (Bardey et al. 2022; Brodie *et al.* 2011). Interview protocols need to think about the concepts that the researchers are trying to elicit in each question and "*then speculate on different scenarios to predict what kind of opportunities might arise*" (Arsel 2017, p. 942). Therefore, in the final section of the interview, we asked participants about their plans for future political events (e.g. possible second EU referendum) in order to have a notion of future engagement intentions. The interview concluded by summarizing the key aspects discussed during the interview in order to allow clarifications and to refute inferences on the data collection before its formulation (Barnham 2015; Spiggle 1994).

Sampling and Data Collection

A purposive sampling approach was adopted for this study. Purposive sampling is an approach often adopted by qualitative researchers designed to recruit individuals from a specific group of the population best placed in addressing the study's research objectives (Alston and Bowles 2007; Daymon and Holloway 2011). Therefore, purposive sampling was considered an appropriate sampling technique as this research aimed to explore political engagement-disengagement of young people 18-24 years. However, the term *young people* is often contested and interchangeably conceptualized. According to Pickard (2019, p.27), there is "*no clear-cut definition of young people…defining young people is varied*" across different academic fields and practitioner research (Kyroglou, 2020; Pickard 2019). For example, disciplines such as Youth Studies, Education Studies, Sociology, Biology, Psychology and Health Studies and Political Science young people are often categorized as 18-24 years

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(Pickard 2019). Further, research carried out by bodies such as The Electoral Commission and polling analysts regularly group young people aged 18-24 years as part of their sampling approach (Johnson and Marshall 2004; Harrison 2020; Russell et al. 2002; Sloam, and Henn 2017; Uberoi and Johnston 2021). Academic disciplines and polling analysts have also used the term *young people* interchangeably representing individuals aged 18-29 year and 18-24 years (Rekker 2022; Smith 2018). Finally, the term *young people* will vary across settings and contexts under study (Pickard 2019). For example, studies contextualized in jurisdictions where the voting age starts at the age of 16, young people are categorized as individuals 16-24 years (Kyroglou, 2020; Pickard 2019). For clarity and consistency, in this study we defined young people as British citizens aged 18-24 years. British citizens were selected as the United Kingdom served to contextualize this study and the eligibility for voting in national elections in the United Kingdom starts at the age of 18 (www.electoralcommission.org.uk).

Informants were selected from a pool of 78 young participants who participated in an initial exploratory study and from those, we contacted 47 young people on the basis that they indicated that had voted in the 2016 EU Referendum, however, were uncertain to vote in future periodic-intermittent elections. A total of 30 young voters agreed to take part in the interview process including 14 women and 16 men from a variety of constituencies around the UK. Interviews were arranged face-to-face or on the phone depending on participants availability and their location in the UK. Data collection was conducted in June 2017 within a month immediately following the General Election 2017. Interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes, were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed resulting in 300 pages of text. All informants received a £25 Amazon voucher as a small thank you for their contribution. Table 1 shows a summary of our sample voting profile.

TABLE 1 [HERE]

Data Analysis

The transcripts from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis as an inductive "*method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*" (Brown and Clarke 2006, p.23). Our coding followed Saldaña's (2016) streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry to show how we moved inductively from raw data to theory (Table 2), an approach consistent with "*phenomenological interpretations of the themes and meanings of texts*" (Saldaña 2016, p. 70) and an iterative process where we moved back and forth within the data inference stage (Spiggle 1994). For clarity, we outline this process in four stages.

Stage 1. We familiarized ourselves with the data collected through transcription, reading, re-reading and writing initial notes (Brown and Clarke 2006) about different ways in which informants engaged with politics and particularly with each political event. This brought to our knowledge that we had not captured the constituencies of some informants and we inquired about them at a later stage, once we concluded the data analysis process. *Stage 2*. We generated initial codes across the entire data set and organized the data into meaningful "text segments" (Greenwood et al. 2002, p.66). We coded the data inclusively, thus we included in those text segments part of the surrounding context in order to avoid a common criticism of coding around the loss of the context in which the phenomenon is embedded (Brown and Clarke 2006). *Stage 3*. We integrated codes into categories, which include groups of coded data that can be compared and consolidated in different ways (Saldaña 2016). For example, the codes around 'how voting affected individuals personally', 'their need to see policies relevant to them' and

'implications to the participant's life' informed the higher order category of 'personal impact and relevance' affecting their engagement with political events.

Stage 4. We integrated categories into themes. Themes are the outcome of coding as they comprise different categories, result from analytical reflection (Saldaña 2016) and capture key aspects related to the research questions (Brown and Clarke 2006). We achieved this through abstraction, which "*collapses empirically grounded categories into higher –order conceptual constructs*" (Spiggle 1994, p. 493) and allows the "*particular reality*" of coding to progress towards the "thematic, conceptual and theoretical" (Saldaña 2016, p. 14). For instance, the categories of 'personal impact and relevance' and 'reluctant respect' characterize the theme of '*limited apathy*' that informs the second research objective to understand voter journeys across political events and future voting intentions, thus capturing an essential dimension informing the engagement journey of young voters. In order to ensure that our themes were an "*accurate representation*" of the meanings of our data, we reviewed the extracts for each theme until we found a coherent pattern (Brown and Clarke 2006, p. 91). Themes were also discussed with other researchers who assisted us in the refinement process through face validity, leading to some adjustments in the naming and definition of themes. Figure 2 outlines the structure of our data from the coding of raw data, categorization and consolidation into key themes and the outcome of our refinement process.

FIGURE 2 [HERE]

Figure 2 offers an overall representation of the empirical, theoretical observations and relationships that configure an emergent theoretical framework to capture three pivotal dimensions of the young voters' engagement journey. The following section presents our findings followed by a discussion emphasizing the implications to theory and practice.

Findings

This section presents the key themes identified from the in-depth interviews (i.e. limited apathy, engagement tactics and personal-social journey transition through multiple political events) which are discussed in light of existing literature on political marketing, customer engagement and customer journeys.

Young voters' Engagement Shows Limited Apathy and a 'sticky customer journey'

The first theme that emerged from the in-depth interviews was *limited apathy* with politics. More specifically, our findings revealed that young voters were far from indifferent to politics, and this was reflected around two aspects: 1) personal impact and relevance of politics and 2) reluctant respect.

Personal Impact and Relevance

Participants emphasised the personal impact and relevance of politics, policies and political issues associated with their levels of engagement with the political process (i.e. UK-EU Referendum and General Elections 2015 and 2017). Specifically, their levels of engagement were a result of 1) how policies and political decisions were put forward by political parties and 2) how politicians personally connected with young voters (Victoria; John; Steve). For example, interest and perceived relevance of political issues, policies and events developed from '*how it affects me and how it affects people all around me in terms of what they [political parties and politicians] would plan to implement*' (Anne). Similarly, it was believed voting in elections was based on personal '*impact on family, my career and money*' for my area (George) and influenced by perceived outcome on their day-to-day lives (Nina).

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This perceived personal impact and relevance appears to develop overtime and strengthened because of the UK-EU Referendum. Many young people argued that up until the 2016 referendum, they failed to fully engage with political process as '*young people do not see the relevance or direct impact*' of politics (John) and politicians and political parties failed to reach out and communicate the significance of politics and policies to young people (Scott). Many young citizens highlighted it was the 2016 UK-EU Referendum, which amplified the '*importance*' of politics in terms of relevance and personal impact as it was '*a big thing*'(Sofia), '*a big gamble*' (Scott), '*a huge deal*' (Sarah), and '*a major long-term decision unlike general elections*' (Leo). Therefore, the 2016 UK-EU Referendum was considered '*a big decision for the country*'(Victoria) and served as a benchmark for future elections/political events as the political event highlighted how politics and policies had a '*direct impact on our everyday lives*' (Linda). This highlights the existence of a 'sticky customer journey' where involvement over time increased due to unpredictable experiences (Siebert et al., 2020), in this case the novelty of the EU Referendum. Indeed, it was recognised that '*everyone was talking about it…unlike normal elections*' (Victoria) such as family, friends, work colleagues, the media, celebrities. Further, this '*once in a lifetime*' political event was such a topical issue. Therefore, the outcome of the UK-EU Referendum was considered a significant event not only as most participants voted in favour of remaining in the European Union, but it allowed participants to reflect and strengthen their recognition of the significance of politics and policies (Anne; Lisa; Nina; Sofia; Louise). This in turn impacted how young voters were predisposed to embrace the next journey/political event.

In addition, several young citizens reflected that '*as life changes, impact will grow, and politics become more important*' (John). Thus, as young citizen's progress through life from leaving university, starting a career, family or buying a house the importance of politics and implementation of policy becomes more apparent (Louise; Lisa; Nina). This suggests that, while young voters need politics to propose creative policies and political decisions reflecting their changing interests in a sticky customer journey that "*continually shifts customer attention to the many possible connections between the service experience and one's own life goals*", young voters also expect to follow a more predictable experience reflected in a "*smooth journey*" (Siebert et al., 2020) when they get older.

Reluctant Respect

Our findings revealed that the outcomes of the elections were not in line with how participants voted. However, they still showed respect for the voting result, and this was a reason for them to become more active in future events, which challenges the idea of apathy characterising young voters. This sheds light on how political views and the nature of social information impacted their social customer journey (Hamilton et al.,2020) around the concept of voter engagement at behavioural, cognitive, and emotional level.

At a behavioural level, our findings confirm that most of our informants voted to 'remain' and were opposed to the collective outcome to 'leave' the European Union [EU]. A small number of participants voted based on instinct with no single reason or research (Linda) as they '*knew all along which way to vote*' (Anne). However, most participants conducted research and provided a rationale for their decision to vote 'remain' including to maintain EU funding (George; Eric), valued freedom of movement (Nina; Leo; Sofia), respected free-trade (Leo), condemn racism and discrimination (Lisa; Louise), supporter of globalisation (Robert) and as there was '*no clear Brexit plan*' (Eric). This illuminates how social drivers inform customer journeys in a political context, thus adds to Hamilton et al. (2021: 86), who emphasised the need for brands to take a position in "hot-button issues" such as social or global concerns.

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At a cognitive level, one participant argued that they '*didn't see any real benefit leaving [the EU]. Leaving would mean uncertainty, no plan, restrictions of trade, freedom of movement and travel*' (Louise). However, despite that most participants provided justification for their choice at the ballot box, many participants were unsure of the justification for a referendum (Victoria). Indeed, several participants argued they '*did not want a referendum*' (Paul; Nina; Steve), '*did not recognise any problems with the European Union*' (Linda; Steve) and '*questioned the value of a referendum*' as Members of Parliament are elected to make important decisions rather than citizens (Robert).

At an emotional level, our findings revealed the vast majority of 'remain' participants were '*annoyed*' (Anne), '*sad and disappointed*' (Rose), "*disappointed but that's democracy*' (Steve), '*the worst thing in the world*' (Nina), '*surprised*' (Sofia), '*frustrated*' (Louise), '*shocked and scared*' (Scott) by the outcome of the referendum. In addition, the only 'leave' supporting participant revealed the UK-EU Referendum was '*confusing with different political stances and views*' communicated by political groups, parties, politicians, the media, family and friends (Joan). However, on reflection the 'leave' supporting participant highlighted to '*completely regret my decision*' for voting to leave the European Union (Joan), yet continued to discuss political issues such as the 'NHS, the 'economy' and 'Brexit' and the 'importance' of voting in future election. The impact of other citizens' reactions and views highlights the impact of other voters in the journey of young voters on future voting intentions. This addresses the question proposed by Hamilton et al. (2021) on the research calls to understand how customer satisfaction can change the way in which individuals relate to their travelling companions in the next social journey.

The majority of participants believed the prospect of a second EU referendum would be '*undemocratic*' and argued that despite the fact the UK would be leaving the EU they '*reluctantly respected*' (Anne) the outcome of the referendum. Indeed, a remain supporting participant argued '*I think the majority voted that they wanted to be out and I think end of the day we should like, we should respect that…that's what democracy is*' (Sonia). This notion of reluctantly respecting the outcome of the referendum led to most participants believing the Government should '*get on with the job of Brexit*' and not pursue a second referendum as this was 'undemocratic' even though the majority of participants voted remain and were not all supporters of the governing Conservative Party. This highlighted a degree of criticality and deep insight into the minds of young citizens and reveals that voter engagement continues to be a complex phenomenon. In addition, our research suggested that the majority of respondents continued to engage *cognitively*, *affectively* and *behaviourally* with politics and were not apathetic with the electoral process following the UK-EU Referendum in June 2016.

Personal and Social Engagement Journey through Multiple Touchpoints

The personal journey was reinforced with the acknowledgment that voting in elections was a civic duty and a vital part of the political process within a democratic society. Thus the journey incorporated a social dimension by considering the influence of 'social others' (Hamilton et al., 2021). Many participants recognised the importance of voting (Scott) as it was their '*civic duty to vote*' due to the '*suffragettes*' (Louise), '*votes for women*' (Sofia) and the fact '*voting is a privilege*' (George) and a way to voice your opinion as illustrated by John:

> "*As I turned old enough to vote, I'd always had it in mind that I was going to vote because it's kind of I now have that power to have a voice and have a say and I almost think if you don't vote, then you can't complain about the country being run because*

> *you had your chance and saying you chose not to do it [...] if you have the power to actually voice your opinion, you should do it in the ballot box and I think you need to make the most of it*" (John).

As John shows, the act of voting in elections provided citizens with the opportunity to verbally, behaviourally and symbolically communicate support or protest for policies, campaigns or political positioning. For example, '*if I don't vote, I don't really have any grounds to complain about what happens because I haven't made any effort to check what is going to happen for the next few years*' (Sarah). Thus, the act of voting provides citizens a mandate or right to comment on political issues and the political process. Indeed, this is supported in the sample profile outlined earlier in Table 1, which highlights that almost all participants voted in all three political events (2015 General Election, 2016 UK-EU Referendum and 2017 General Election) apart from two participants in 2015 and 2016 and five participants in 2017. For our informants, the desire to vote was motivated by a variety of social influences, including the sacrifice of past generations to gain voting rights (e.g. suffragettes), their compromise with society and the impact on future generations. These new social influences emerging from political events as a new context extend the understanding of "*travelling companions*" in the social customer journey by addressing the need to understand conscious and unconscious influences in the journey (Hamilton et al., 2021).

In order to assist the understanding our inductive approach to explore voters' engagement journey, we used insights from the 'Prototypical Engagement Persona' (PEP) categorisation proposed by Pich et al. (2018). The application of the PEP throughout political events showed that, whilst the majority of participants voted in 2015, 2016 and 2017, the characteristics of engagement (i.e. responsive, latent, cynical, disaffected, instinctive, reluctant, floating and disinterested) varied within and across each election as outlined in Table 2.

TABLE 2 [HERE]

More specifically, Table 2 illustrates the engagement characteristic of each participant for each election/political event, future elections, and highlights political affiliation and attitude towards a second UK-EU Referendum. Further, Table 2 identifies that some participants [underlined codes] changed political affiliation throughout their political journey between political events. For example, Robert voted for the Labour Party in the 2015 General Election and voted Conservative in the 2017 General Election. Indeed, this was also the case for Scott who voted for the Liberal Democrats in 2015 and Labour in 2017 and also the case with Sonia who voted Conservative in 2015 and Labour in 2017. The variety of engagement and scarce loyalty with specific political parties seems to be motivated by political parties having little understanding of the social others and specific touchpoints in young voters' journey.

The application of the PEP also allowed us to identify three distinctive journeys across different political events: 1) responsive, 2) labile and 3) habitual (non-loyal) engagement journeys. This led to the identification of new voter touchpoints and the proposal of a framework to assess voter engagement and journey mapping in political events.

Responsive Engagement Journey

Our findings revealed that most participants consistently showed a *responsive engagement journey* with politics and the political process in 2015, 2016 and 2017, meaning that they were fully engaged cognitively, emotionally and behaviourally with the political elections-referendum (Pich et al. 2018). Eric, a young voter from the Brentwood and Ongar constituency (Essex) illustrates this when he self-proclaimed to have been '*always interested in politics*',

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voted in all local and national elections and revealed the rise of '*homelessness*', the importance of a '*strong economy*' and '*cap on university tuition fees*' as key issues of interest (Eric). Eric's responsive engagement journey is illustrated in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3 HERE

Indeed, Eric 'shared' videos and news stories via social media platforms however did not 'create' or 'comment' to online political content as politics is a '*private matter*'. Further, Eric approached '*each election with a fresh pair of eyes*', disliked negative and hyperbolic campaigning and ascribed to an '*optimistic…keep calm and carry on*' mentality (Eric).

Labile Engagement Journey

An unexpected finding was the identification of a *labile engagement journey*, reflecting the changing nature of voters' interactions with politics across different political events. This engagement journey could be classified as 1) floating engagement or 2) disengagement to responsive engagement.

Floating Engagement. The second most common engagement journey included floating voters. Floating individuals could be categorised as exhibiting some behavioural engagement tendencies such as registering to vote and the act of voting, however lacked cognitive and emotional engagement (Pich *et al.* 2018). This engagement journey was most prominent for young voters in the 2015 GE compared to 2016 Referendum and 2017 GE. As Figure 4 illustrates, in 2015 Linda, in the Conservative constituency of Barnet [London], paid very little attention to the election, conducted no research and was '*direct by my parents*' to vote for Labour and recognised that '*I didn't pay attention. Too young…didn't see the impact*' (Linda).

FIGURE 4 HERE

As part of this journey, in 2016 and 2017, Linda progressed to become an instinctively engaged voter defined as being behaviourally and emotionally involved yet lacked a reasoned position. Linda was 'c*onfused*' about the justification and rationale for a referendum and perceived the European Union to be a force for good '*what was wrong with the EU…stay with the status quo*'. Despite reviewing political posts and reading news articles on political content on social media platforms such as Twitter, she felt '*immigration seemed a big issue*' but failed to expand on this or reveal specific policy which underpinned their vote. In addition, Linda did not '*create or share*' content as they did not feel '*confident and do not have that knowledge yet*' and as they lacked a reasoned position they were 'influenced' by the party they voted for in 2015 – Labour (Linda). Further, she did not view the televised leader's debates or take part in political discussions with family and friends. Likewise, Linda adopted the same approach for the 2017 GE however also viewed a comparison platform on social media which compared-contrasted the policies of the main parties and this 'simple comparison helped' (Linda). Nevertheless, she believed that the '*referendum woke people up*' and as they '*progress in life will become engaged and engagement will grow. Voting is important and now can see the direct impact*' and now they are aware of this impact they '*can't block politics out'*. Therefore, this example illustrates the voter journey is complex and reveals the transition from political event to political event originally categorised as *floating* engagement moving to *instinctive* engagement and potentially responsively engaged for future elections-referendums.

Disengaged to Responsive Engagement. By contrast with floating engagement, our findings also reveal that several participants were *instinctively engaged* for example: 1) behaviourally and emotionally engaged but lacked cognitive engagement (Victoria, Robert, Linda); 2)

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disaffected in terms of emotionally engaged but cognitively and behaviourally disengaged (Nathan, Richard); 3) or *reluctant* for example behaviourally and cognitively engaged but lacking emotional engagement (George, Leo, Sean). Furthermore, very few participants were characterised as *latent* (cognitively and emotionally engaged but lacking behavioural engagement) or *cynically* engaged (cognitively engaged but lacking emotional and behavioural engagement). Therefore, regardless of their categorisation to the PEP typology (Pich *et al.* 2018), the findings reveal that the majority of participants took part in the political process and engaged with the political activities and tactics throughout all the elections/political events.

Nevertheless, it was difficult to categorise the journey embraced by Sean, one participant who failed to cognitively, emotionally or behaviourally engage with the political activities. Sean did not vote in the 2015 UK General Election and reflected that he had '*no interest in politics*' in 2015. Figure 5 shows Sean's disengagement to engagement journey.

FIGURE 5 HERE

Similarly, Sean did not vote in the 2016 UK-EU Referendum as '*I didn't have enough knowledge on to be able to make a good judgement or decision…no emotion…happy with decision not to vote*' (Sean). We could argue that he made a transition from 2015-2016, from little-to-no cognition, emotion or demonstration of behaviour to a cynical characteristic demonstrating cognition but absence of emotion and behaviour. Following on from 2016 Referendum to the 2017 General Election, we witness another transition from cynical to reluctant engagement (behaviourally and cognitively engaged but lacking emotional engagement). In the last stage of his journey, Sean voted Labour in 2017 as he was inspired by the online communication tools used by the Labour Party. The use of social media '*captures imagination, creates interest and is a catalyst…this election showed the power of social media*' *and social media platforms such as Snapchat, Facebook and online sponsored political advertisements encouraged the individual to 'share information posted by friends*' (Sean). Further, the engagement with social media platforms encouraged him to review the manifestoes in order to research the '*truth*'. Labour was seen as '*for the many not the few and Conservatives for the rich and privatising the NHS. Labour manifesto costed in comparison with the Tories*' (Sean). In addition, '*at the minute I don't really have any emotions. Can't see the personal impact at this moment in time*' (Sean). This shows that Sean was '*still unsure direct impact as all parties say the same*' yet would engage in future elections '*will vote next time. Shows the power of relevant and reliable informed content. More engaged in the future*' (Sean). Therefore, this section highlights the potential presence of an eight characteristic, which could be classified as 'total disengagement' and also the transition from 'total disengagement to cynical, reluctant and potentially responsive in the future.

Habitual not Loyal Engagement Journey

Contraire to the voting activity outlined in table 2, the majority of participants believed that they were not necessarily *loyal* to a political party but more self-identified as *habitual voters*. For example, one participant did not identify as a '*habitual voter. It's about what I believe in and what I stand for…not loyal but habitual to voting*' (Andrew). Similarly, Sonia identified as a habitual voter born out of civic duty '*but not loyal to [one] party*' and was '*loyal to opportunities*'. Habitual in the sense of taking part in political activity i.e. voting rather than loyal to one particular party was a common theme across the interviews (Rose; Anne; Nina; Joan; Leo; Sofia for example). One participant argued it was '*too early to say*' whether they could be defined as a loyal voter given that they had only taken part in two General Elections (John). This is an interesting point as the 2015 General Election was the first opportunity the

majority of our participants were eligible to vote and it may be premature to categorise the loyalty of voters based on two elections. For example, our findings highlighted that the two main UK political parties (Labour and Conservatives) received most support compared to other UK parties as outlined in table 3. Indeed, reflecting back to the 2015 UK General Election, there was a clear split with eleven participants supporting the Conservatives and eleven participants supporting the Labour Party. Further, the majority of participants voted to 'remain' in the European Union in 2016. However, in the 2017 UK General Election, many voters switched allegiance for example from the Liberal Democrats to Labour (Scott), Conservative to Labour (Tony), from other political parties to Labour (Andrew) or from not voting to Labour (Sean). This is consistent with a swing in support of young voters to Labour in 2017. However, there were revelations that more participants did not vote in 2017 compared with 2015 and 2016.

Rationale for not voting in 2017 was put down to '*disillusion*' (Joan) following the outcome of the 2016 Referendum, '*cynical*' of an unnecessary election (George), '*lack of belief*' in party leaders and manifestoes (Nathan) and continued to be '*unsure*' who to vote for out of the two main parties (Sonia). Furthermore, fewer Conservative supporting voters '*reluctantly*' voted for Theresa May's Conservative Party in 2017 (Rose, Robert, John, Lisa, Victoria, Eric, Ian) compared with 2015 as they did not '*trust*' a Jeremy Corbyn Labour Government. Paradoxically, participants including Conservative supporters reflected on the Labour Party's '*attractive*' (Rose) and '*appealing*' policies (Robert) and '*liked the sound of Labour's values*' (Lisa) but '*disliked*' the Conservative '*right-wing*' (Rose) manifesto in terms of the '*dementia tax and removing free school meals*' (Robert) and generally '*trivial*' policies (Rose).

Nevertheless, when participants were asked their voting intention if there was an impending General Election, many participants argued that would support the same party they supported at the last election. However, if there was a General Election in the long-term future [12 months and beyond], almost all participants would consider voting for a 'different' political party (George, Rose, Nina, Scott for example). Furthermore, voting for a 'different' political party in the long-term future opposed to imminent short-term election was a common theme and future decisions on which party to support would '*depend on policy*' (John, Anne, Lisa) but also '*policies and leader*' (Scott, Joan, Sofia, Sarah, Sonia, Andrew). Therefore, the prospect of supporting different political parties different from previous elections represents an opportunity for political stakeholders particularly as young voters acknowledged that their decisions would be aided by policy and leader rather than party. In addition, the majority of participants believed they their engagement would strengthen as they progress in life, particularly due to the increased awareness of the personal impact of politics in practice and they would continue to actively research politics and policies in future elections. Therefore, political stakeholders should never abandon voters based on demographics as they have an opportunity to design policy to appeal to the wants and needs of voters and ensure policies and political messages are made '*relevant*' and communicated to emphasise the implications of policies in practice (John).

Touchpoints in the Customer Engagement Journey of Young Voters

Through the examination of the previous journeys, we identified five key touchpoints including (1) media, (2) voter-led research, (3) online interaction, (4) personal networks, and (5) face-to face events. Table 3 outlines examples of the tactics used to engage voters.

TABLE 3 HERE

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First, our exploration of customer engagement journeys shows that young voters engaged with political events through a variety of *media touchpoints*, including printed and broadcast media, outdoors advertising (e.g. buses and posters), or letters and leaflets posted on the mail. These were used throughout the voters' journey using different types of information, although placing a greater emphasis in the pre-election stage where. The use of advertising and engagement with a variety of media confirms existing scholarship on touchpoints (Baxendale et al., 2015) and extends it by showing its impact on a political context.

Second, from our analysis *voter-led research* emerged as a new theme, involving 1) access to political content such as news, manifestoes, leader debates or key pledges; 2) Official platforms (e.g. YouGov) and 3) Informal platforms such as online quizzes to assess who to vote for or jokes about politicians. Different types of content and platforms contribute to the elaboration of the sticky customer journey and excitement (Siebert et al., 2020) by identifying touchpoints where political parties have less control (e.g. jokes about politicians). This responds to calls for research to identify new ways in which consumers conduct research (Mele and Russo-Spena, 2021). Third, online interactions through social media show an important touchpoint how social others influence the motivation to initiate a journey, share information and impact future stages (Hamilton et al., 2021). Our informants used social media platforms to gather information, share videos, new stories. However, they refrained from creating content because they were concerned about getting into an unwanted debate, being criticised and thought they did not know enough to post their own content. This shows how voters navigate conflicts between their own political views and those of the network, which extends Hamilton et al. (2021), who suggest that disclosing political views can help brands and influencers to get closer to other people in the network.

Fourth, *personal and social networks* represent another major touchpoint. Young voters highlighted discussions with family and friends and recognised that their parents had a big influence in their decisions, especially during the first few elections.   This sheds light on the ways in which younger consumers use word of mouth from family and friends to raise curiosity engage in an exciting 'sticky journey' (Siebert et al., 2020). Election night parties were a new touchpoint emerging from the data highlighting young voters' the desire to experience the elections while they are happening as well as the after-outcome. Interactions in specific touchpoints inform the rest of the journey (Becker et al., 2020), thus impact voters' views on future elections.

Finally, voters reported interaction with *political stakeholders and institutions* including those where 1) political parties were reaching out (e.g. door knocking, organising meetings/talks), 2) campaigning in elections or 3) signing e-petitions. These were more typical in the pre- and during election stages of the voters' journey. The unique nature of the political context allows the identification of this new touchpoint representing a way for political stake holders to get positive and negative feedback. This understanding extends Voorhees et al. (2020), who emphasises the lack of understanding (un)solicited feedback to understand customer journeys.

In this section, we show how touchpoints are used by political stakeholders to facilitate engagement with political events and create interactions with voters. While media engagement and voter-led research show a more unidirectional way of accessing information, voters used other interactive means that made them co-facilitators of political engagement for other people. By uncovering the abovementioned touchpoints in a political context, we respond to Siebert et al. (2020), who suggested the need to know how virtual and physical touchpoints are connected and Singh (2021) by showing how individual and collective touchpoints enhance customer engagement.

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Discussion and Implications

This study reveals insight into the 'voter journey' by highlighting levels of engagement across multiple political events and identifies engagement with touchpoints. This understanding extends existing research on voters' engagement restricted to a single election campaign (Pich et al. 2018; Pickard 2019) or a single engagement dimension (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014) and addresses explicit calls for further research on young voter engagement (Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd 2004; Dermody et al. 2010; Dermody et al. 2010; Harrison 2020; Pickard 2019; Russell et al. 2002; Sloam and Henn 2017). In addition, this study contributes to the literature on customer journeys by uncovering novel insights emerging in this political context (Johnston et al. 2018; Lees-Marshment, 2019; Lees- Marshment *et al*. 2019; Lin 2017; Nunan and Domenico 2019; Parackal et al. 2018; Walker *et al.* 2019; Wilson and Paleologos 2018).

This interdisciplinary study addresses explicit calls for further research on young voter engagement (Chakravorti 2010; Henn *et al*. 2005; Johnston et al. 2018; Nunan and Domenico 2019; Parackal et al. 2018; Pich et al. 2018; Sloam and Henn 2019; Wilson and Paleologos 2018. In addition, this study aimed to identify effective communication tactics as touchpoints in the young voter's journey to inform future political stakeholders' decisions. Our research tracked the engagement levels, reflections and experiences of the political process of the same generational cohort from the 2015 UK General Election, 2016 UK-EU Referendum, 2017 UK General Election and hypothetical future elections. Understanding the constructs of engagement including behaviour, cognition and emotion and capturing how young voters embark on a journey of engagement, we revealed a fuller account, which up until now remained under-researched and under-developed (Dermody et al. 2014; Hollebeek et al. 2019; Shawky et al. 2022). For example, young voters continue to call for persuasive campaigns tailored to their wants and needs, political issues made relevant (Johnson and Marshall 2004; Sloam, and Henn 2017) and for political actors to develop genuine long-term relational connections with them (Islam et al. 2019; Lees-Marshment 2019; Simmons 2016). Furthermore, we found that young voters are less apathetic of politics and the political process as previous research suggests (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014; Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd 2004; Dermody et al 2010; Gorecki 2013) and political participation continues to increase and diversify (Kyroglou 2020; Pickard 2019). Young people continue to call for clearer, detailed and engaging information prior elections and political events (Harrison 2020; Johnson and Marshall 2004; Russell et al. 2002), which in turn would support strengthening the long-term voter journey.

In addition, this study highlighted voters develop their political attitudes, feelings and behaviour through time and embarked on a reflective journey often transitioning from different levels of engagement, which impacts future political events (Harrison 2020; Russell et al. 2002; Sloam and Henn 2017). Indeed, our young voters 'reluctantly respected' the outcome of elections irrespective of how they voted and that engaging with the political process was a responsibility (Dermody et al. 2010; Pich et al. 2018; Spierings and Zaslove 2017). Further, we revealed that our young voters engaged more with the political process on the realisation of the personal impact and individual relevance of political issues and policies (Johnson and Marshall 2004; Sloam and Henn 2017). The perceived personal impact and relevance of politics and policies in action also had an impact on engaging and voting in future elections (Harrison 2020; O'Cass 2001; Russell et al. 2002; Sloam and Henn 2017). In addition, it was uncovered that young voters self-categorised themselves as less habitual in terms of voting for the same party/politician compared with voting characteristics of parents and more likely to switch allegiances from election to election (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014; Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd 2004; Dermody et al. 2010; Gorecki 2013; Pich et al. 2018). This presents a

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unique opportunity to practitioners with the prospect of appealing to voters beyond their traditional support base and enhancing long-term engagement.

The Voter Engagement and Journey Mapping Framework

Based on our inductive themes and building on existing research (Johnston et al. 2018; Lin 2017; Parackal et al. 2018; Pich et al. 2018; Wilson and Paleologos 2018), we put forward a systematic model, which deconstructs the voter journey across previous, current, and future political events. This model assesses characteristics of engagement, to understand the touchpoints used by politicians within elections to engage with voters. The first-hand experiences will reveal whether voters are apathetic and highlight opportunities to strengthen engagement in future elections. With this in mind, we put forward a six staged model entitled the '*voter engagement and journey mapping framework*' visualised in figure 6 and outlined in table 4.

FIGURE 6 HERE

TABLE 4 HERE

Stage one involves instructing voters to reflect on their previous engagement in elections/political events. Experiences are categorised via the eight characteristics of engagement linked to their personal journey and online and offline touchpoints associated with the previous election/political event are catalogued. Based on our study, we incorporated 'disengagement' as a new characteristic missing in the original conceptualisation (Pich et al. 2018). The disengagement characteristic would apply to an individual who lacks cognition, behaviour or emotion in terms of political activity and engagement. The eight characteristics include: *Responsive, Latent, Cynical, Disaffected, Instinctive, Reluctant, Floating,* and *Disengaged*. Once voters have reflected on their engagement and experiences in relation to previous elections/political events, this will reveal the first stage of the voter journey. *Stage two* focuses on exploring voter engagement and experiences in the current election/political event. Like stage one, experiences are categorised via the eight characteristics of engagement linked to their personal journey and online and offline touchpoints associated with the previous election/political event are recorded. This in turn will reveal if and how the voter journey has developed compared with previous engagement and experiences and highlight new, preferential, or undesirable touchpoints. Stage three involves identifying the prospective engagement journey of voters in relation to future elections/political events. This will highlight potential opportunities in terms of positioning political messages, policy development or adopting touchpoints to strengthen engagement. Stage four focuses on a holistic view of the voter journey reflecting on stages one, two and three. This will indicate if and how the voter journey has changed over time and provide a detailed understanding of how the first-hand experiences and touchpoints have impacted the voter journey. Successful and engaging touchpoints can be maintained whereas unsuccessful and unappealing touchpoints can be retired or redesigned to ensure touchpoints continue to resonate and engage voters. Stage four will also reveal engagement, disengagement, voter apathy and notion of civic responsibility. Finally, stage 4 will reveal whether voters are receptors of information, co-facilitators and/or co-creators. Practitioners and researchers should return to table 3 [table of customer journey touchpoints] and reflect on successful touchpoints and/or make note of new/emerging touchpoints. This is followed by stage five, which focuses on the operationalisation of findings captured from stages one to four.

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Stage five focuses on strategic planning and utilises the opportunities and limitations identified from stages one to four which can be used to improve, maintain or strengthen voter engagement. Political strategists should ensure communications/messages/brands emphasise personal impact and relevance across all touchpoints and remain consistent and non-contradictory. Further, stage five focuses on how strategists should respond to step 4. Strategists should determine whether voters will be classified as receptors of information, co-facilitators and/or co-creators in future political events. Appropriate touchpoints should be adopted to appeal and resonate with voters. Finally, stage six focuses on routinely mapping and updating insight into the voter journey. This includes revisiting the voter journey [stages one to four] on a routine basis and appraising the appeal and engagement of touchpoints. This could be carried out every six to twelve months. However, the specific timeframe can be adjusted based on resources of the political strategists, political environment and political events. Auditing the voter journey will also involve revisiting stage five and amending/refining the strategic plan and touchpoints if required. In addition, stage six can be supported with additional primary or secondary research to strengthen understanding of the voter journey. Therefore, stages one to six will uncover past, current and potential characteristics of engagement and outline whether individuals have transitioned from election to election. In line with recent customer journeys research, in some contexts consumers only continue their adventure if it is exciting, so firms must invest in variation mechanisms (Siebert et al., 2020). Our cyclical systematic framework can be used as an auditing tool to understand the voter engagement-journey and a mechanism to develop voter engagement in future elections. This represents a series of opportunities for academics and practitioners (Andreasen 2002; Caywood and Preston 1989; Chakravorti 2010; Claudy and Peterson 2014; Nunan and Domenico 2019; Walker et al. 2019). We specifically detail these opportunities in the following section.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This study has implications for theory and practice. In terms of theory, this study addresses the identified theoretical gaps that existing research does not address the complexity of voter's engagement including all dimensions of engagement [behavioural, cognitive and emotive] towards political events (Barrett and Brunton-Smith 2014; Bowden et al. 2017; Heath et al. 1985; Lang and Witts 2018; Peng and Hackley 2009; Philips et al. 2010; Reynolds 2006). Therefore, given the limited understanding of the 'voter' journey opposed to abundant research dedicated to the 'consumer' journey (Barwitz and Maas 2018; Novak and Hoffman 2019; Dellaert 2019; Kranzbühler et al. 2019), researchers should acknowledge that voter engagement involves not only behavioural *but* also emotional and cognitive dimensions and different levels of engagement. More specifically, researchers should adopt a holistic approach of voter engagement and periodically investigate the experiences of young voters and consider how they interact with online and offline touchpoints as their appeal and relevance may change over time.

First, the changes observed in voter's customer journeys suggest that to be engaged, younger voters need an element of excitement that is relevant to their lives and keeps them interested. The present study further challenges the dominance of a "smooth customer journey" and extends the understanding "sticky customer journeys" by identifying young voters' engagement as a new area where this type of journey is more effective. As Siebert et al. (2020) emphasise "whereas the smooth journey model is ideal for instrumental services that facilitate jobs to be done, the sticky journey model is ideal for recreational services that facilitate never-ending adventures" (Siebert et al., 2020). Thus, the smooth journey model might be more

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effective for older voters who tend to be more loyal to a particular party, while younger voters tend to follow a stickly and adventurous journey.

Second, the developed *voter engagement and journey mapping framework* makes a contribution to theory as there are limited models designed to understand the three dimensions of political engagement (cognitive, behavioural and emotive) (Bowden et al., 2017; Hollebeek et al*.,* 2019; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010). In addition, this supports the explicit calls to explore the changes in political engagement and the reason behind these changes (Pich et al. 2018). The developed framework recognises that individuals can make transitions from characteristic to characteristic and considers that citizens can be classified as 'disengaged'. Disengaged individuals are an important group of people who might presently show no engagement in political events, but they might become interested or show some degree of engagement in the future. Therefore, the comprehensive framework in which the voter's journey and 'disengaged' voters are considered goes someway in addressing calls for more models in political marketing research, which in turn will advance the development of theory and challenge existing propositions (Scammell 2015).

Practitioners should study our research and recognise the potential for young voters to co-produce or co-facilitate political content or communication tactics, which can strengthen interaction, engagement and believability content (Dellaert 2019; Voorhees et al. 2017). More specifically, as young citizens co-facilitated rather than shared [co-created] political content particularly online, this presents another opportunity for practitioners to be creative when designing messages and communicating policies as young citizens could become ambassadors and key influencers when it comes to recommunicating political content (Archer-Brown *et al.* 2017; Dellaert 2019; Lin and Himelboim 2018). As online marketing expenses continue growing, practitioners need to understand the best way of allocating resources across various touchpoints showing an understanding of how consumers interact and leverage multiple information channels during the customer journey (Li et al., 2020). Therefore, practitioners should ensure political issues and policies are relevant, emphasise the personal impact and communicated via multiple tools-tactics appropriate to the target market.

The *voter engagement and journey mapping framework* has implications for practice. Practitioners can use the systematic framework as a guide of how to gain access into the hidden world of the voter journey and periodically explore levels of engagement and audit the success [or not] of political messages, marketing activities and policies across different political events. By investigating the voter journey across political events and exploring the experiences of voters in the political process, this in turn will provide practitioners with a greater understanding into the complexity of young voter engagement and allow practitioners to maintain/strengthen engagement with citizens (Dermody et al. 2010; Macnamara et al. 2012; Nickerson 2006). In addition, practitioners will be able to adopt and apply the *voter engagement and journey mapping framework* to map out the degree of engagement-disengagement during past and present political events but also consider future political events/elections. This in turn will allow practitioners to use the framework strategically to understand and monitor the voter transition/journey and consider how they can strategically utilise political activities and tactics to improve engagement and build long-term relationships with citizens-voters (Lees-Marshment, 2019; Lees- Marshment et al. 2019).

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that future studies could address. The first limitation of this study focuses on the sample. This research adopted an exploratory, interpretivist approach

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aimed at understanding voters' engagement journey with the electoral process after the 2016 UK-EU Referendum. Considering the dearth for research in this area, a qualitative approach was deemed as the most appropriate method to address the research objectives. Although we reached 'theoretical saturation' within our sample of thirty participants, a larger sample might offer more depth of insights. Future studies could adopt a quantitative approach to measure the characteristics of voter engagement and audit the voter journey and test the effectiveness of marketing tools on the voter decision-making process. Another area that deserves further research attention is the exploration of the touchpoints identified (e.g. voter's led research) and assess its operationalisation across different settings and contexts. Likewise, new studies could replicate this research and develop a comparative study to generate deeper insight and understanding of young voter engagement and the voter journey across jurisdictions. Alternatively, scholars could continue to explore the impact of marketing tools and activities within elections and political events for different types of engagement. This will provide political campaign managers with a pragmatic understanding of engagement tools and select appropriate tools-activities for different target markets. Another area that would benefit from research effort includes the integration local, national and international political events as part of an investigation into young voter engagement and the voter journey. Finally, future research could adopt more non-traditional and creative research methodologies to investigate young voter engagement, voting experiences and the voter journey such as utilising qualitative projective techniques, or an ethnographic-netnographic approach as this may provide a greater insight than standalone interviews or focus group discussions.

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Table 1: Informants Voting Profile

Informant	Gender	Constituency	2015 UK GE	2016 EU Ref	2017 UK GE
Paul	Male	Broxtowe – Nottinghamshire – Conservative	Labour	Remain	Labour
George	Male	East Londonderry – NI - DUP	SDLP	Remain	Did Not Vote
Eric	Male	Brentwood and Ongar – Conservative	Conservative	Remain	Conservative
Victoria	Female	Colne Valley – Conservative up until 2017 election then Labour	Labour	Remain	Labour
Rose	Female	Sherwood Nottinghamshire – Conservative	Conservative	Remain	Conservative
Linda	Female	Barnet - Conservative	Labour	Remain	Did Not Vote
Robert	Male	North Warwickshire - Conservative	Labour	Remain	Conservative
John	Male	Northwest Leicestershire – Conservative	Conservative	Remain	Conservative
Anne	Female	Kingswood Bristol - Conservative	Labour	Remain	Labour
Lisa	Female	Congleton in Cheshire – Conservative	Conservative	Remain	Conservative
Nina	Female	Leeds West – Labour	Labour	Remain	Labour
Steve	Male	Burton – Uttoxeter - Conservative	Labour	Remain	Labour
Joan	Female	Hinckley and Bosworth - Conservative	Conservative	Leave	Did Not Vote
Leo	Male	Chipping Barnet – Conservative	Conservative	Remain	Conservative
Scott	Male	Hull West and Hessle - Labour	Liberal Democrat	Remain	Labour
Mary	Female	Nottingham East - Labour	Unknown	Remain	Unknown
Nathan	Male	Nottingham East - Labour	Did Not Vote	Did Not Vote	Did Not Vote
Sofia	Female	Mid-Derbyshire - Conservative	Unknown	Remain	Labour
Louise	Female	South Suffolk	Conservative	Remain	Labour
Sarah	Female	Broxtowe - Nottinghamshire- Conservative	Labour	Remain	Labour
Sonia	Female	Peterborough – Conservative [in 2015] and Labour 2017 and 2019	Conservative	Remain	Did Not Vote
Ian	Male	Thornbury and Yate - Conservative	Conservative	Leave	Conservative
Sean	Male	Corby - Conservative	Did Not Vote	Did Not Vote	Labour
Andrew	Male	Nottingham East [then Nottingham South] - Labour	Green	Remain	Labour
Richard	Male	Nottingham East - Labour	Did Not Vote	Did Not Vote	Did Not Vote
Claire	Female	Nottingham East - Labour	Labour	Remain	Labour
Tony	Male	Doncaster Central - Labour	Conservative	Leave	Conservative
Angela	Female	Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland - Conservative	Labour	Remain	Labour
Jim	Male	Burton - Uttoxeter - Conservative	Conservative	Remain	Labour
Mark	Male	Gedling - Labour	Labour	Remain	Labour

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Table 2: Characterised Levels of Engagement from 2015 – Present

Characteristic	2015 GE	2016 [REF]	2017 GE	2ND REF? - YES	2ND REF - NO	2ND REF - Unsure	Future GE – Different
Responsive	Paul, Eric, Rose, Anne, Lisa, Steve, Joan, Scott, Mary, Sarah, Sonia, Ian, Andrew, Claire, Tony, Angela, Jim, Mark	Paul, George, P3, Victoria, Rose, Robert, John, Lisa, Nina, Steve, Scott, Mary, Louise, Sarah, Sonia, Ian, Andrew, Claire, Tony, Angela, Jim, Mark	Paul, Victoria, Rose, Robert, John, Anne, Lisa, Nina, Scott, Sofia, Louise, Sarah, Ian, Andrew, Claire, Tony, Angela, Jim, Mark	Robert, John, Anne, Nina, Scott,	Paul, Eric, Victoria, Rose, Lisa, Steve, Sofia, Sarah, Sonia, Ian,	George, Joan, Louise, Andrew, Claire, Tony, Angela, Jim, Mark	Paul, George, Eric, Victoria, Rose, Linda, John, Anne, Lisa, Nina, Steve, Joan, Scott, Sofia, Louise, Sarah, Sonia, Ian, Sean, Andrew, Claire, Tony, Angela, Jim, Mark
Latent			Sonia,				
Cynical		Sean	George, Joan,		Sean		
Disaffected	Nathan, Richard	Nathan, Richard	Nathan, Richard		Nathan, Richard		Nathan, Richard
Instinctive	Victoria, Robert,	Linda, Anne, Sofia,	Eric, Linda, Steve,		Linda,		
Reluctant	George	Leo,	Leo, Sean		Leo,		Robert, Leo,
Floating	Linda, John, Nina, Leo, Sofia, Louise,	Joan					
DISINTERESTED [NEW] – no desire or interest	Sean						
Key	Red = Labour, Blue = Conservative, Yellow = Liberal Democrat, Black = Unknown, Green = Green Party, Purple = SDLP, Under-lined = Change of Party Support						

Table 3: Customer journey touchpoints during the 2016 EU Referendum and 2017 UK General Election

Main touchpoints	Touchpoints categories	Examples in the data	Political event stage
Media	Printed media	The Guardian Online, Kerrang Rock & Metal Magazine, Daily Telegraph Newspaper, Leaflets	Pre-, during and post-election.
	Broadcast (TV, radio)	Andrew Marr Television Programme, Sky News, BBC News Channel, Channel 4 News, ITV News,	Pre-, during and post-election.
	Outdoors	Buses	Pre-, during election.
	Mail	Leaflets	
Voter-led Research	Political Content	Manifestoes, Leader Debates, News, Key Pledges [not manifestoes]	Pre-, during, post-election.
	Official platforms	YouGov	Pre-, during, post-election.
	Informal platforms	Quizzes 'who to vote for', Jokes about Politicians, Fact Checker Website, Simple Comparison – 2 Parties,	Pre-, during, post-election.
Online interaction	Social media (interactive)	Facebook (includes videos, news stories), Twitter, Snapchat,	Pre-, during, post-election.
Interaction with Personal and social networks	Informal in-person interactions	Discussions with friends-family, Election Night Party	Pre-, during- post
Interaction with political stakeholders and institutions	Political parties reaching out	Door Knocking, Attended Meetings-Talks, GE Campaign	Pre-, during election.
	Campaigned in Elections-Referendum		Pre-election
	Signed e-petition		Pre-election, post-election

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Figures

Figure 1: **Overlapping Engagement Characteristics and Prototypical Engagement Persona – Adapted from Pich et al. (2018:605)**

Engagement Level	Engagement Characteristic	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioural
Responsive	A responsive young person is defined as being fully engaged cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally with the political event.	√	√	√
Latent	A latent young person is defined as being cognitively and emotionally engaged, but not behaviourally engaged.	√	√	-
Cynical	A cynical young person is defined as someone cognitively engaged who fails to participate in behavioural engagement and lacks a discernible emotional response to any of the possible political outcomes.	√	-	-
Disaffected	A disaffected voter is defined as a person engaged emotionally, but not cognitively or behaviourally	-	√	-
Instinctive	An instinctive voter is defined as being behaviourally and emotionally engaged but lacking a clear and reasoned position.	-	√	√
Reluctant	The reluctant voter is defined as being behaviourally and cognitively engaged, but lacking an emotional commitment to any outcome in the political event	√	-	√
Floating	The floating engagement persona is defined as a young person that exhibits some behavioural engagement but lacks cognitive and emotional engagement.	-	-	√

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Figure 2: Data Structure

EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS   **CATEGORIES**   **THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS**

- Voting decision based perceived impact of policies and how they will personally affect me.

- Need to see direct relevance of policy in action.

-Implications of applied policy to my life will determine how I vote.

-Decision to vote is influenced by potential impact of policies to me, friends and family.

Personal impact and relevance

-I think the majority voted that they wanted to be out and I think end of the day we should like, we should respect that…that's what democracy is.

-Get on with the job of Brexit and not pursue a second referendum as this would be undemocratic.

-Despite voting remain, no to a second referendum. Majority rules.

-Second referendum would be undemocratic. Reluctantly respect the outcome.

Reluctant Respect

Limited Apathy (sticky customer journey)

-Always interested in politics, voted in all local and national elections and concerned with issues such as economy, homelessness and tuition fees.

-Important to vote, however it is difficult to find a party which represents you…you can't agree [with the party] on everything yet weighed up all the options.

-Reflected and researched the policies and parties online and offline through a variety of different tools and platforms.

Responsive Engagement Journey

- Did not engage much in previous elections but became more proactively finding information and voting especially after Brexit outcome.

- Did not have much interest or felt anything about elections. Some thoughts about politics but active engagement and interest in politics with develop with age.

Labile Engagement Journey

Personal and Social Engagement Journeys

(through multiple touchpoints)

-In the short-term, young voters would continue to vote the same as they voted in the previous election-event.

-Long-term, the vast majority of young voters would be prepared to vote for a different political party based on research and policies.

-Now aware of politics, can't block it out.

-Will approach every election [in future] with a fresh pair of eyes.

Non-Habitual Engagement Journey

-**Media (printed, broadcast, outdoors, mail).** Traditional platforms and communication activities continued to be used by politicians/parties to engage participants with the political process such as radio broadcasts, political television programmes, newspapers, news channels, personalised letters, posters, leaflets.

-**Voter led Research (official and informal platforms)**: Manifestoes , leader debates, key pledges, You Gov, Quizzes to Vote for, Jokes about politicians, Fact checker website, Singple comparison 2 parties and.

Young voters as receptors of information

-**Online interaction (e.g. social media)**. Engaged with a range of communication tactics such as social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter and Snapchat to research policy, sharing content and political messages.

- **Interaction with personal networks face-to-face interaction**. Discussions with friends and family; Election night parties.

- **Interaction with political stakeholders and institutions**. -Political parties reaching out (e.g. Door knocking), Campaigning for elections, attending meetings.

 - Voters Refrained from 'creating' content as due to awareness of a potential backlash, unwanted debate, not confident enough and believed not to possess enough knowledge on the subject to create content.
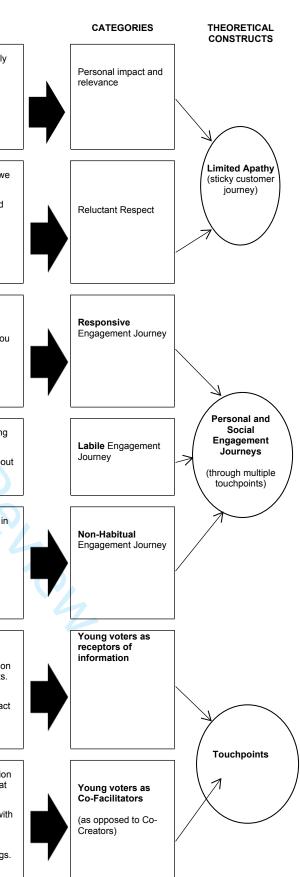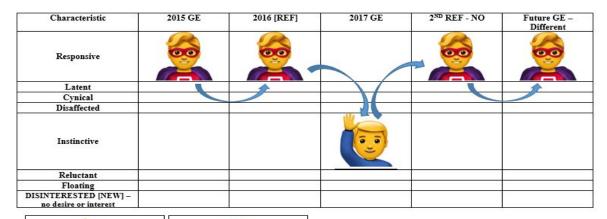
Young voters as Co-Facilitators

(as opposed to Co-Creators)

Touchpoints

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Figure 3: Eric's Responsive Engagement Journey

Characteristic	2015 GE	2016 [REF]	2017 GE	2ND REF - NO	Future GE – Different
Responsive					
Latent					
Cynical					
Disaffected					
Instinctive					
Reluctant					
Floating					
DISINTERESTED [NEW] – no desire or interest					

Woman Raising Hand= This emoji used to show someone who is behaviourally and emotionally engaged.

Man Superhero = This emoji used to show someone who is fully engaged

Figure 4: Linda's Labile Engagement Journey (Floating Engagement)

Characteristic	2015 GE	2016 [REF]	2017 GE	2ND REF - NO	Future GE – Different
Responsive					
Latent					
Cynical					
Disaffected					
Instinctive					
Reluctant					
Floating					
DISINTERESTED [NEW] – no desire or interest					

Woman Farmer = This emoji used to show someone who is behaviourally engaged.

Woman Raising Hand= This emoji used to show someone who is behaviourally and emotionally engaged.

Woman Superhero = This emoji used to show someone who is fully engaged.

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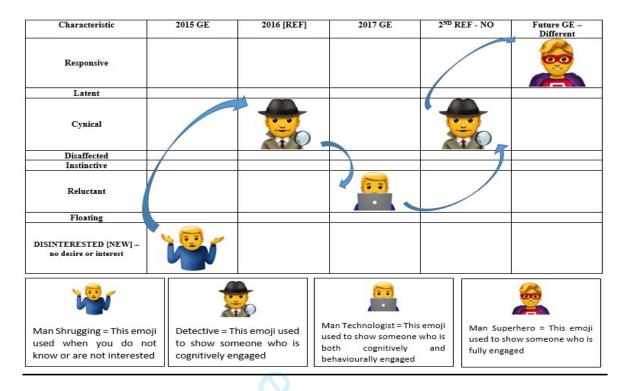**Figure 5:** Sean's labile engagement journey (Disengagement to Engagement)

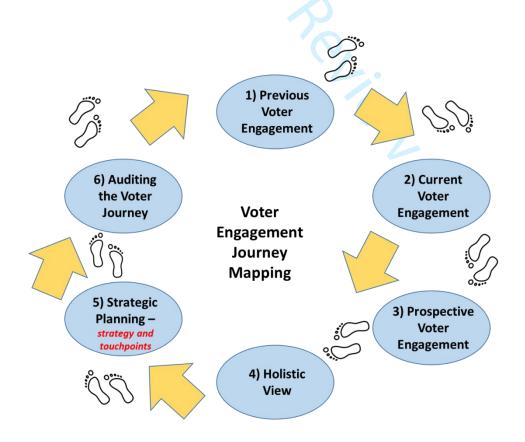**Figure 6:** The Voter Engagement and Journey Mapping Framework

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Table 4: Overview of the Voter Engagement and Journey Mapping Framework

Steps	Key Components	Eight Characteristics of Engagement
Step 1 – Previous Engagement	Assessment of the previous engagement journey of voters in relation to the eight characteristics of engagement: *Responsive, Latent, Cynical, Disaffected, Instinctive, Reluctant, Floating, and Disengaged.*	1. **Responsive** - A responsive person is defined as being fully engaged cognitively, emotionally, and behaviourally with the political event. 2. **Latent** - A latent person is defined as being cognitively and emotionally engaged, but not behaviourally engaged.
Step 2 – Current Engagement	Stage two focuses on identifying the current engagement journey of voters in relation to the eight characteristics of engagement: *Responsive, Latent, Cynical, Disaffected, Instinctive, Reluctant, Floating, and Disengaged.*	3. **Cynical** - A cynical person is defined as someone cognitively engaged who fails to participate in behavioural engagement and lacks a discernible emotional response to any of the possible political outcomes. 4. **Disaffected** - A disaffected voter is defined as a person engaged emotionally, but not cognitively or behaviourally
Step 3 – Prospective Engagement	Stage three focuses on identifying the prospective engagement journey of voters in relation to the eight characteristics of engagement: *Responsive, Latent, Cynical, Disaffected, Instinctive, Reluctant, Floating, and Disengaged.*	5. **Instinctive** - An instinctive voter is defined as being behaviourally and emotionally engaged but lacking a clear and reasoned position. 6. **Reluctant** - The reluctant voter is defined as being behaviourally and cognitively engaged, but lacking an emotional commitment to any outcome in the political event 7. **Floating** - The floating engagement persona is defined as a young person that exhibits some behavioural engagement but lacks cognitive and emotional engagement. 8. **Disengaged** - An individual who lacks cognition, behaviour or emotion in terms of political activity and engagement.
Step 4 – Holistic View of the Voter Journey	Stage four focuses on a holistic view of the voter journey reflecting on stages one, two and three. Stage four will also reveal engagement, disengagement, voter apathy and notion of civic responsibility.	This will indicate if and how the voter journey has changed over time in reference to the eight characteristics of engagement and provide a detailed understanding of how the first-hand experiences and touchpoints have impacted the voter journey. In addition, this will reveal whether voters are receptors of information, co-facilitators and/or co-creators. Practitioners and researchers should return to table 3 [table of customer journey touchpoints] and reflect on successful touchpoints and/or make note of new/emerging touchpoints.
Step 5 – Strategic Planning – *Operationalisation*	Stage five focuses on strategic planning. This stage utilises the opportunities and addresses limitations identified from stages one to four which can be used to improve, maintain or strengthen voter engagement.	Political strategists should ensure communications/messages/brands emphasise personal impact and relevance. Further, this stage focuses on how strategists should respond to step 4. Strategists should determine whether voters will be classified as receptors of information, co-facilitators and/or co-creators in future political events. Appropriate touchpoints should be adopted to appeal and resonate with voters.
Step 6 – Auditing Voter Journey	Stage six focuses on auditing the voter journey stages one to four on a routine basis. Ideally every six to twelve months. However, the specific timeframe can be adjusted based on resources, political environment and political events.	Auditing the voter journey will support revisiting stage five and amending/refining if required. Stage six can be supported with additional primary or secondary research. Finally, stage six will reveal the consistency of engagement characteristics, highlight whether engagement characteristics need refining/updating and/or the addition of new engagement characteristics.