An exploration into voting behaviour: A thematic analysis on what drove voting on the Brexit Referendum on a University sample

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ABSTRACT

Whom and what the populace votes determines the outcome of democratic mechanisms, hence, voting behaviour is a fundamental component of the political process that shapes democratic societies (Degan and Merlo, 2011); thus, it is understandable why the act of voting is the most studied phenomenon within political science (Lapatinas, 2014). There are several causal cues that may affect an individual's voting decision (Neimi and Weisberg, 2001), which previous literature has explored through a variety of democratic mechanisms, such as elections (Feddersen and Pesendorfer, 1997), referendums (Midtbø and Hines, 1998) and even issue-specific referenda such as EU integration referendums (de Vreese, 2005). However, recently the 2016 Brexit referendum introduced a new type of issue-specific referenda aiming towards the withdrawal from the EU, which due to its novel-nature literature on it is limited. Largely due to the focus political science places on '*what*' rather than the '*why*', the breadth of research within this discipline fails to account for underlying causes of why these factors affect behaviour. Therefore, this journal aimed to explore what influenced voting behaviour in the Brexit and why. The data was collected by six semi-structured interviews, which were analysed via thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The themes emerged were '*Cost and Benefit Calculations*', '*EU Attitudes*' and '*Leader Image*'. It was apparent that the efficacy of these influences depended on an omnipresent drive to fulfil their worldviews. Implications, limitations and further research based on findings are discussed.

Introduction

What is Brexit?

The United Kingdom (UK) has been a member of the European Union (EU) for more than forty years. However, on June 23rd when the EU referendum occurred asking the populace to either remain or leave the EU, the British nationals voted in favour of Brexit (Britain-Exit) and severing their ties with the EU. This may have seemed as a wise decision considering the UK's yearly input towards the EU budget, which for 2015/16 was 13.6 billion (Keep, 2017), would effectively seize after a Brexit.

However, the consequences may have far outweighed the benefits. Approximately half of the UK's trade originates from the EU, making it the UK's largest trading partner (Office of National Statistics, 2016). A Brexit would end this highly lucrative relationship, as it would lower trade between the two due to higher tariff barriers (Dhingra et al., 2016b). Similarly, it would affect foreign investment (for reasons see: Dhingra et al., 2016a), which the UK is a major recipient of, with stock value of over £500 billion originating from other members of the EU (UKTI, 2015). While, according to the Centre for Economic Performance the consequences for UK living standards would be detrimental, even by setting aside reduced EU trade and foreign investment, the decrease in income would equate to £6,400 per household each year (Dhingra et al., 2016b).

Due to the high risks of Brexit, the result of the vote was viewed with high levels of incredulity by many commentators. This vote has since caused a tremendous amount of political disturbance, triggering the Prime Minister's resignation, David Cameron, and effectively dividing a whole nation. Hence, it is vital to explore what influenced the vote and why, not only for the consequences currently bestowed upon the nation, but also the ones that are yet to arise.

What is Voting Behaviour?

Voting is a form of political behaviour, the investigation of which reveals what affected decision-making towards the vote (Brooks, 2014; Neimi and Weisberg, 2001). There is a copious amount of research on voting behaviour within differing democratic mechanisms, such as: elections (E.g. Coxall, 1992), referendums (E.g. Leduc, 2002) and even issue-specific referenda on EU integration (E.g. Holbolt, 2006). All of which are conducted under the discipline of political science. It is argued, in order to fully interpret voting behaviour, psychological investigation is necessary (Visser, 1994); in fact, the affinity between the two disciplines has been accentuated in recent times, with political campaigns relying on psychological information about voting behaviour when devising campaign strategies.

Leader image

Existing literature highlights the relationship between voting choice and leader image. Leader image can be envisioned as the voter's cognitions about prominent leaders supporting or contesting a proposal, which forms their decision according to the nature of their perceptions (Bartle, 2005). Yet, the influence of leader image has been discussed controversially, as research has suggested both strong and weak effects on voting behaviour (see: Stewart and Clarke, 1992; Stevens et al., 2011). Clarke et al. (2013) shed light on this debate by utilizing data gathered from a national survey to explore the impact of leader image on voting in Britain's 2011 referendum on the Alternative Vote electoral system. Using multivariate statistical analysis, they discovered that leader image had a strong positive and negative effect on voting behaviour. Thus, elucidating the debate by suggesting that knowledge of leader position mediated image, and therefore effected the vote. Nevertheless, as Clarke and colleagues acknowledged, the strength of the effect within their findings may be criticised for being conditioned by voter's level of political knowledge. Therefore, in order to shed additional light on how leader heuristics affect voting, further research must be conducted.

Attitudes

Recent articles suggest a scholarly debate over what affects voting behaviour on EU integration referenda between the 'attitude' and 'utilitarian consequences' schools of thought (E.g. Hobolt, 2005). The 'attitudes' school focuses on values and beliefs, and argues that voting choice is due to people's underlying attitudes towards the EU (Siune et al., 1994; Svennson, 1994, 2002). As this highlights what affects voting behaviour, one is unable to comprehend why this occurs without the use of psychology. Research under this discipline, underlines that affective states can shape behaviour (Winkielman et al., 2007; Lönnqvist, 2013); this may influence one's attitudes towards the EU. Levine (2005) who implemented a longitudinal election scenario on 143 college students found that values have a small yet significant correlation to voting choice, further supports this notion. However, these results may be limited by the sample as it consisted of first-time voters that could in turn create more erratic voting behaviour, in contrast to older voters who may have already established their decision-making patterns (Strate et al., 1989). Contrarily, LaPiere (1934) found attitudes are not always predictive of behaviour; nevertheless, this notion is heavily supported (Schwartz et al., 2010; Leimgruber, 2011; Caprara et al., 2006) and addresses the question of why certain individuals vote against the 'status quo'.

Utilitarian Consequences

Furthermore, the 'utilitarian consequences' school of thought offers an alternative perspective on voting behaviour in referenda that is concerned with the influence of personal benefit. The Rational Choice Theory (See Petracca, 1991) has been widely used to explain voting behaviour, accounting for cues like personal benefit. The main assumption is that a rational individual is presented with several choices and ultimately chooses the option that aids the achievement of their goals. Gabel (1998) aimed to explore the effect of personal benefit on voting behaviour; a regression analysis was conducted on surveys from several referenda within the period of 1978-1993. The analysis suggested that utilitarian consequences offer robust influences on the voters. Therefore, he proposed that voters exploit opportunities arising from EU membership, such as the internal single-market economy or the free movement of people, goods and capital.

However, this study's validity may be criticized, because it maintains a perpetual bias against pursuit of the common interest. Despite this limitation, utilitarian consequences are supported by research (Fleisher, 1985; McLaren, 2002) and further studies have developed a concept of cost and benefit calculation.

Brexit Research

The Brexit was a prime example of disintegration referenda, which is considered as a referendum aiming towards partial or full retraction from international institutions (Walter et al., 2016). Acting as one of the few studies examining the Brexit, Clarke et al., (2016) used data from national panel surveys administered prior and post referendum to conduct a multivariate analysis, to identify what forces shaped voter's decisions. The results underline the previously mentioned influences of cost/benefit calculations, attitudes to EU membership and leader image. They also suggested further influences of risk assessments (consequences of leaving the EU). Although many of these influences have been supported by previous literature, this study like the majority under the discipline of political science are based on self-report surveys, which have been criticised for social desirability and response validity (Karp and Brockington, 2005). Nevertheless, it offers insight into the factors affecting the Brexit vote; however, lacked exploration into reasons behind these factors.

Present Study

A wide range of research has highlighted that Brexit would have severe socio-economic consequences, such as shrinking the economy (Baker et al., 2016), reduction in welfare expend (Morgan, 2016) and even have implications for capitalism itself (Uhembe Ahar, 2016). Much of which was common knowledge as it was widely broadcasted by the conservative party during its campaign (see Hobolt, 2016), yet 52% of people still voted 'Leave' going against the 'status quo'. Considering this and the limited research on this novel type of referenda, what affected voting behaviour on the Brexit offered an interesting topic for psychological exploration. Therefore, a point can be made that psychology may be used to explain voting behaviour. Consequently, considering the shortcomings within previous literature the predominant aim of this review was to provide psychological insight to a traditionally political subject by exploring what compelled the persons to vote and motivations behind these factors. This was achieved in a qualitative manner, as it allowed for the investigation of 'why' due to its exploratory nature (Brown, 1996), in order to provide an in-depth understanding of why voters are influenced, which previous literature is yet to accomplish.

Research Question

1) Explore if and why 1) cost & benefit calculations 2) risk assessment 3) attitudes towards EU membership 4) leader image, in accordance with Clarke et al., (2016), Clarke et al. (2013), Levine (2005), Gabel (1998), Petracca, (1991), affected a student sample.

Methodology

Design

A qualitative approach of 1-to-1 semi-structured interviews was utilized, as it enabled participants to freely express first person accounts of their experiences of voting on the Brexit referendum in their own words (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). A naive realist epistemology was implemented, which highlighted the participant's idiosyncratic experiences as valuable rather than constricting (Sternberg and Sternberg, 2011), the reason being that this rudimentary knowledge of why factors affect the voters must be constructed before a more advanced analysis commences.

Participants

Contact with participants was attained via volunteer sampling by use of invitation letter (Appendix 1) posted on a private social media account exclusive to university students (Appendix 2). This enabled their free will, as they contacted the researcher if they were willing and available to participate in the study. To ensure participant anonymity, after the interview they were instructed to select a pseudonym of preference (for participant and interview information, see Appendix 3).

The sample was exclusive to student voters because it offered insight into a continually growing population (UCAS, 2015), which previous literature on referenda has not selectively explored. Inclusion criterion included participants who evoked their right to vote in the Brexit Referendum, while exclusive criteria comprised of any non-university populace who did not vote.

There is no fixed number concerning how qualitative studies are conducted, while a small sample is how exploratory studies are best conducted (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006). This is due to the emphasis qualitative research places on understanding why, rather than generalizability. Therefore, if a sample is excessively big, data faces the risk of becoming superfluous (Mason, 2010). Thus, considering this, and the highly time consuming process of thematic analysis (Aronson, 2016), six interviews were deemed appropriate.

Materials

An 'interview schedule' was utilized to guide the interview, consisting of 15 conversation topics – 14 of which were theory-led by previously stated literature on what influences voting behaviour. The last question was kept general, asking for the order of influences, in hopes of creating a model during the report writing stage. An example question is 'what are your emotional reactions towards the EU?'.

An 'Audio recording device' was used to record the interviews and aid with the transcription process, were the investigator transcribed a verbatim account of all spoken data in the recording. This was done for all interviews before being able to conduct the analysis.

Data Collection

Participants read the information sheet (Appendix 4) expressing the aims of the research and information about complaint procedures, allowing for full transparency. After having read that, they signed the informed consent sheet (Appendix 5) and chose where the interview took place, as it is a common curtesy to allow the participant to do so (King and Horrocks, 2010).

A pilot interview was conducted to assess possible issues within the interview schedule (Appendix 6). None of which arose, so the schedule maintained its original nature. This was used as a guide during the semi structured recorded interview. Data was collected in this manner as it offered equilibrium between the

structure of ethnographic surveys and the flexibility of open-ended interviews (Whiting, 2008). It also allowed the development of rapport with the interviewee and exploration of emerging topics, due to its adaptability (Banister et al., 2011). Probing was used to gain further insight, when an interviewee's answer was unclear (Farrell, 2011). The data was collected specifically for this journal during the interview. Upon the completion of the interview, the participants were fully debriefed (Appendix 7) and thanked for their participation.

The researcher transcribed a verbatim account of all spoken data in the recording, retaining any information helping maintain its original nature while excluding any information that was not practically suited for the purpose of the analysis (Edwards, 1993). This was done for all interviews before being able to conduct the handwritten analysis (see example: Appendix 8).

Analytical Process

The data was analysed via a six-stage thematic analysis, adhering to Braun and Clarke (2006), which required transcribed data to be analysed and reflected upon (Riessman, 1993). The purpose of this was to identify meaningful patterns across data, providing answers to research questions being addressed (Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999). To do so, thematic analysis was treated as a recursive process including reading and re-reading, through which codes and themes were generated. The generation of initial codes from the data was achieved via an inductive approach, because previous literature was accounted for within the interview questions. The themes emerged on a semantic level as the lack of previous research on why cues affected voting behaviour, it was only natural to consider participants statements at face- value (Boyatzis, 1998).

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, this study was subject to ethical approval (Appendix 9). Accounting for the principle of autonomy, the participants were entirely autonomous as the process was developed to avoid coercion.

Furthermore, due to the methods employed, confidentiality was not assumed because of the use of direct quotations in the analysis section; however, the participants were fully aware of that upon reading of the participant information sheet, before providing consent. To ensure anonymity and mask identity upon potential dissemination of the journal, the respondents were given the opportunity to select pseudonyms after debrief. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point up until a given date (on the participant information sheet).

The questions on the interview schedule were tailored to avoid any feelings of distress, for example about the result of the vote. Nevertheless, if harm was experienced they were offered support options if they deem it necessary. The investigator was the only one with access to data collected, stored on a password-protected laptop. The data was stored until the completion of the study upon which the data was deleted from the laptop and all type of cloud storage.

Analysis

The participants delivered an open and in-depth account of what affected their vote towards the Brexit. The interviews adopted a retrospective view on the subject, as the vote had already occurred prior the conversations.

The key themes emerged via thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews, which is the underpinning of qualitative analysis, as it enables the investigator to construe meaning from the respondents (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Three themes were established as significant and consistent in most of the interviews: *'Cost and Benefit Calculations', 'EU Attitudes'* and *'Leader Image'* which encompass sub-themes to aid in the explanation of the core themes thoroughly. The themes are presented in order of significance, as provided by the respondents.

Cost and Benefit Calculation

The first theme '*Cost and Benefit Calculations*' was consistently the most influential throughout all respondents. It refers to personal evaluations conducted prior the vote, pertaining to information perceived either as a cost or a benefit of the potential outcome.

Costs

'*Costs'* were reflected upon as negative phenomena deriving from a potential Brexit. Numerous participants emphasised the importance costs had on their vote. Interestingly, the participants offered two differing explanations as to 'why' costs influenced their voting, which is evident within the following samples:

> Daniro: "…*I see myself as…somebody who wants to engage with living and traveling the European continent and in the buildup to the vote I became increasingly anxious that essentially I would have a lot of my liberties taken away from me…*" (13-17)

> Bart: "…*there would be such a deficit* [if Brexit occurred]*, and considering most of our trade deals are with the EU and because were not a country that manufacture much…if we vote to leave…it would have a devastating effect for the country*" (6-10)

Daniro offered a more idiosyncratic motive, perceiving a potential Brexit as something that would impinge on his freedom. Whereas, Bart offered a collective reason, by suggesting the Brexit would have a detrimental effect on the country. Both respondents exemplify an underlying drive, determined by their values, needs and worldviews. This drive was why costs influenced the participants, while their personal and collectivist reasons acted as representations of it.

Benefits

In contrast to the previous sub-theme, '*benefits'* were considered as positive phenomena deriving from a potential Brexit. The respondents exemplified how the benefits outweighed the risks for them, portraying the significance perceived benefits played. This was apparent within the following examples:

> Tasha: "…*it is a massive benefit* [potential Brexit] *by making our own rules without having to go through Brussels and kind of vote out people who we don't want…I think that the risks of it going bad versus the risks of it going right were lower.*" (39-42)

> Terry: "...*for me the benefit outweighed the risk. Originally, I remember Farage saying something about getting 3 million pounds extra for the NHS, maybe the amount he claimed was high, but savings from the EU budget contribution are real*".

Both participants illustrated an influence of external motivations on their decision. Tasha perceived a potential Brexit as an opportunity to make Britain more autonomous. While, Terry was motivated by the potential benefits

regarding social welfare. Both respondents were driven by the inner instinct introduced in the previous sub-theme. The difference being accounted by their differing –from the previous sub-theme participants- values, needs and worldviews.

Overall, the persons were influenced by cost and benefit calculations due to an omnipresent drive to fulfil their needs, worldviews and motivations. Depending on each individual's motivations, needs and worldview, they were influence by either costs or benefits, and expressed their vote as a means to reach these.

EU Attitudes

The second theme '*EU Attitudes*' was a highly prevalent factor considered by the respondents. It was referred to as the person's emotional reaction, or consensus towards the EU, consisting of two facets, positive and negative attitudes.

Positive Attitudes

'*Positive Attitudes*' were deliberated as optimistic and constructive. The following examples illustrate the influence positive EU attitudes imposed on the respondents' voting behaviour:

> Daniro: *"…a large part of it* [reasons affecting his vote] *is that I am culturally and ideologically attached to the EU and I do think that the EU is a beacon of hope and peace for the world and so I thought leaving it would not only weaken the EU but also weaken Britain…"* (54-59)

> Judith: *"…I want and believe in the EU and I have a lot of pride in it. I think they are an important international body and I wanted to preserveit and keep it as strong as possible, so that is why I wanted Britain in it"* (120-123)

Both participants demonstrated a positive emotional connection towards the EU. Their attitudes were driven by their desire to preserve what they believed to be worthy, in this case the EU and the UK within it; which ultimately affected their vote.

Negative Attitudes

'*Negative Attitudes*' are referred to as undesirable by the participants. The following excerpts exemplify the significance negative attitudes had on the participants voting behaviour:

> Rodney: *"…the EU is not that great, look at what it's doing to Greece, trying to squeeze every single penny out of its people…why would I ever want my country to be part of something that values money over solidarity"* (158-161)

> Tasha: "…*like I said before, I dislike the EU. I despise that we can't do anything without it going through Brussels* [headquarters of EU] *first…I wanted to change that…"* (99-102)

These samples portray the respondents' belief in a '*Utopic*' state, a mental projection of how their country should be. This mental projection drove their voting behaviour, while the negative attitudes acted as its by-product.

Largely, attitudes, both positive and negative, derived from an internal projection of how the UK and the EU should be. Depending, on the degree of similarity between reality and their projection, they manifested either positive or negative attitudes towards the EU, which ultimately affected their voting behaviour.

Leader Image

The third theme '*Leader Image*' was a prevailing theme amongst the respondents and ranked as the least influential of the three. It was referred to as how views of influential political leaders affected voting behaviour. Leader images act as either, positive or negative.

Positive Leader Image

'*Positive Leader Image*' were deliberated as positive ideations surrounding prominent leaders. The subsequent samples illustrate its influence on voting behaviour:

> Bart: *"Jeremy Corbin definitely influenced me, because everything he stands for is pretty much everything I stand for, like he's very much about social welfare, he's a socialist and he wants to increase all the positive sectors such as welfare, education and such."* (89-91)

> Judith: *"I am a proud Corbin supporter…I really identify with him, the things he says just click with me…probably because we have similar ways of thinking." (101-104)*

These revealed the forthright impact of positive leader image on voting behaviour, which was due to the tantamount conceptions between the 'voter' and the 'leader'. Hence, the congruence between idiosyncrasies was why positive leader image influenced voting behaviour.

Negative Leader Image

'*Negative Leader Image*' was considered as the negative conception held by the voter concerning a specific leader. Examples of how these influence voting behaviour include:

> Daniro: *"I guess the least important influence is that I just didn't really like Farage, and people supporting leave, I didn't like their policies, and I didn't like them at all. There was a clear moral divide within a lot of the figures who supported leave are morally repugnant people and I don't want to be seen as the same side as them"* (130-133)

> Bart: *"Nigel Farage was another reason I voted remain, because I fucking despise the man, erm. Boris Johnson, I don't like him either, because of his elitist attitude"* (91-93)

It was apparent that both respondents held negative ideations about certain politicians. These conceptions steered the participants vote in opposition to what was suggested by the leader, due to the fear of being identified as their

supporter. Thus, the dissimilarity in drives between the leaders and the respondents manifested negative leader image influenced voting behaviour.

All-inclusively, leader image both positive and negative derived from the degree of similarity between drives between voter and leader. If the drives were congruent between the two, it manifested positive leader image, conversely is they were not similar the voters expressed negative leader image.

Discussion

Overall, the research aims and question was successfully explored and three themes were generated. The analysis provided with both considerable support and enhanced the understanding of previous literature.

Aspects emerged supporting previous literature from Clarke et al. (2013) pertaining to the impact of leader image on voting decision as it was established as the weakest, yet highly prevailing influence amongst respondents. However, in addition to investigating the extent to which leader image persuaded voting behaviour, this research provided deeper understanding as was demonstrated by the positive and negative effect leader image might play on voting behaviour. Similarly, previously undiscovered insights were established regarding underlying reasons of its impact.

Specifically, every individual was driven by his or her values, needs and worldviews. Whether a respondent manifested a positive or negative leader image was due to the congruence between their and the leaders drive. Thus, positive leader image was due to high level of congruence between leaders and voters, while negative leader image originated from low level of congruence. Thus, further research could explore the novel insights regarding leader image, in hopes of providing an even better understanding of the extent leader image influences voting behaviour and its relationship with the inner drive.

Concerning the EU 'attitudes' school of thought, findings added to previous research conducted by Levine (2005) who established that values correlate to voting choice. Due to the methods employed to explore this topic, Levine was unable to establish the type of relationship between voting and attitudes. The current research offers an explanation to this, as values are part of the inner drive displayed by the respondents throughout the analysis section. Thus, as exemplified by the present findings, values do correlate with voting choice, but in a much more indirect way than Levine proposed, via an individual's internal drive. Furthermore, previous literature has failed to account for the dual nature displayed by positive and negative attitudes, thus, further research should explore this relationship to provide a more holistic understanding of EU attitudes. The knowledge of which could potentially lead to positive socio- communal change and acceptance.

Findings regarding the 'utilitarian consequences' school and research within it were mixed. In relation to Gabel (1998), the findings illuminated the limitation deliberated within the introduction section of this report – that he maintained a perpetual bias against pursuit of the common interest and emphasized the influence of personal benefits. Whilst these did play a role in voting decision,

they were not as significant as the collective reasons. Concerning the Rational Choice Theory (Petracca, 1991), findings were highly relatable as the respondents used their vote in rational terms as a means to an end. However, what Petracca failed to account within his theory was why these affected the voters' behaviour. The present research postulated that the respondents were influenced by cost and benefit calculations due to an omnipresent drive to fulfil their needs, motivations and worldviews, thus, their vote acted as a vehicle of attainment for these.

Arguably, the findings were most coherent with contentions provided by Clarke et al. (2016). The congruence between the current research findings and Clarke and colleagues was demonstrated through the aforementioned influences of leader image, EU attitudes and cost and benefit calculations. Furthermore, regarding their assertion on the influence of risk assessments, the present findings exemplified that these were intrinsic to the cost and benefit calculations. The variance may be accounted to the differing methodologies utilized, as quantitative research asserts the investigator as the expert, while qualitative research may challenge this relationship, thus allowing the participant to portray their own understanding of the issue. However, this dispute offers a context rich area for further research to explore, in hopes of illuminating the area.

Further research could empirically explore posits arisen from this study by investigating the nature of the omnipresent drive as it may implicate itself to additional types of behaviour and not merely to voting. Similarly, research could further investigate the interplay and extent to which the internal drive mediates a cues effectiveness, as it would provide with rich and valuable understanding. Finally, this study discovered three influences to voting behaviour, each with its own degree of importance for the respondents (see Appendix 10 for Voting Behaviour Model), however failed to account why these influences were quantified in that order. Perhaps, individuals voting on referenda with less potential consequences may have been influenced otherwise. Thus, further research should explore the issue of significance further.

Limitations

This study was subject to numerous criticisms. Firstly, the use of six participants arose the issue of limited experience. While the sample-size for this study was supported by previous literature, further research could explore the subject area by conducting a larger scale study, as it may provide with other previously undiscovered influences.

Secondly, due to the participants' differing levels of political knowledge, the nature of the findings may have been influenced, as the more politically aware individuals may have been more educated on the issue. Nevertheless, not everyone who votes is necessarily highly politically aware, therefore, this limitation may have provided with a more diverse representation of the populace. Thus, further research may explore the relationship amidst political awareness, causal cues and voting behaviour.

Finally, the nature of the sample may have been a concern in a number of ways. Firstly, the university experience involves the experimentation with novel interests, experiences and ideas, which could influence the voter's inner drive,

consequently leading to an alteration of voting decision. Secondly, an older sample may have provided with differing opinions on the matter, as 64% of 65+ voted 'L*eave'*, while 71% of young adults voted *'Remain'* (Moore, 2016). Thus, accounting for these criticisms, further research should utilize a cross-generational sample, which would provide a wider range of experiences, and older voters who expectantly will have settled-down, in terms of their inner drive.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current research gained insight into what affected voting decision towards the Brexit. This study also provided discernments into why cues affected behaviour, which due to neglected aspects of previous literature were undiscovered. In addition, this study acted as a stepping-stone, as it provided with several recommendations on how research within this subject-area must be conducted, as well as numerous content-rich areas for further exploration. However most importantly, this research shattered the methodological shackles of political science on how to explore voting behaviour and was the first of expectantly many studies within the discipline of political psychology, exploring both what affects voters and why.

Reflexive Analysis

Drawing upon Willig's (2013) conventions of reflexivity, I will be exploring how my personal and epistemological perspectives influenced the findings of this study.

Exploring my personal perspective on the issue, I realise that my beliefs and experiences have shaped my research. This is closely related to the two key reasons I chose to explore this topic. Primarily, a couple of years before the Brexit Referendum I partook in a similar referendum vote, effectively on the fate of Greece within the EU. What sparked my interest from this experience was that I found myself evaluating my experiences and exploring what affected my vote. This shaped my research as I specifically explored issues that personally influenced myself, which may have hindered my opportunities for a greater exploration of the subject matter. Therefore, my experience may have acted as a trigger for an inadvertent expectation bias, with me disregarding any conflicting data. Secondly, I was influenced by my personal views on the matter, as I was a very adamant *'remain'* supporter. The fact that Britain voted *'leave'* was something I did not take lightly, which steered me to investigate this issue to gain a greater understand of what sort of cues influence voters and why. It is important to state that no humans live without experiences and opinions and that these influence everyday life. In this case, they may have affected my ability to objectively conduct this study, thus creating a sense of confirmation bias. A prime example of this can be found in the opening paragraphs of my introduction, which is heavily weighted towards the costs of Brexit rather than the benefits.

Furthermore, my epistemological perspective also impacted the findings. The first standpoint influencing the research was during the data collection process, as it was conducted the winter after the Referendum occurred. This raises the issue of people having trouble recalling details of what affected their vote and why, which could have potentially been of great analytical importance. Similarly, the stretch between the time the participants formulated their decision and the time the interview happened, may have also affected the validity of the findings. This is because the respondents may have re- evaluated their conceptions due to post-referendum occurrences and thus provided the researcher with those altered ideas rather than the original ones. Moreover, the sample utilised -University students (18-24) - within this study may have bias the findings. The sample arises the issue of technology availability. What is meant by this is that chances are that a young sample (18-24) will be more actively engaged with technology, such as the internet, as opposed to an older sample (65+). This may have not influenced the research findings directly, yet it may have affected the way the participants formulated their decision.

Furthermore, it is of significant value to state that no research is conducted within a *personal or epistemological vacuum*, while any shortcomings deriving from these are due to our nature as human beings.

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