

# Relationship between sociodemographic, psychosocial and political marketing variables in voting and abstention behavior among the youth

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**ABSTRACT** This article presents a type of descriptive research by means of surveys that have the objective of establishing the relationship between socio-demographic, psychosocial and political marketing variables in the voting behavior of Bogota's youth between the ages of 18-25. To do this, a 54-question survey was designed and was taken by 273 young people from two universities in the city (Universidad Nacional de Colombia and Fundación Universitaria Cafam). The results show that age, gender, political socialization and the image of the candidate are the variables that increase the probability of voting in the young university population in Bogota. The importance of this research in consumer psychology is to highlight the responsible political consumption from a political education that gives young people in the country the necessary tools in order to use their right to vote and choose a candidate with clear criteria.

**KEYWORDS** abstentionism, voting behavior, political marketing, political participation, consumer psychology.

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## Relación entre variables sociodemográficas, psicosociales y de *marketing* político en la conducta de voto y abstencionismo en jóvenes

**RESUMEN** Este artículo presenta una investigación, de tipo descriptivo mediante encuestas, que tiene como objetivo establecer la relación entre las variables sociodemográficas, psicosociales y de *marketing* político con la participación electoral de jóvenes bogotanos de 18 a 25 años. Para ello se diseñó una encuesta de 54 preguntas que se aplicó a 273 jóvenes universitarios pertenecientes a dos universidades de la ciudad (Universidad Nacional de Colombia y Fundación Universitaria Cafam). Los resultados muestran que la edad, el género, la socialización política y la imagen del candidato son las variables que aumentan la probabilidad de voto en los jóvenes universitarios bogotanos. La importancia de esta investigación en psicología del consumidor es resaltar el consumo político responsable a partir de una educación política que les brinde herramientas a los jóvenes del país para utilizar su derecho al voto y elegir con criterios claros un candidato.

**PALABRAS CLAVE** abstencionismo, conducta de voto, *marketing* político, participación política, psicología del consumidor.

## Relação entre variáveis sociodemográficas, psicossociais e de marketing político na conduta de voto e abstencionismo de jovens

**RESUMO** Este artigo apresenta um estudo de tipo descritivo mediante pesquisas que tem como objetivo estabelecer a relação entre as variáveis sociodemográficas, psicossociais e de marketing político com a participação eleitoral de jovens bogotanos de 18 a 25 anos. Para isso, elaborou-se uma pesquisa de 54 perguntas que se aplicou a 273 jovens universitários pertencentes a duas universidades da cidade (Universidade Nacional de Colômbia e Fundação Universitária Cafam). Os resultados mostram que a idade, o gênero, a socialização política e a imagem do candidato são as variáveis que aumentam a probabilidade de voto nos jovens universitários bogotanos. A importância deste estudo em psicologia do consumidor é ressaltar o consumo político responsável a partir de uma educação política que dê ferramentas aos jovens do país para utilizar seu direito ao voto e eleger com critérios claros um candidato.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE** abstencionismo, conduta de voto, marketing político, participação política, psicologia do consumidor.

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## Introduction

In Latin American countries, democratic participation in presidential elections, which are the most important for states, shows a high percentage of abstention. Thus, in Bolivia the abstention rate is close to 5% (Perez, 2010); in Brazil, 18%; in Costa Rica, 30%; in Cuba, 3%; in Ecuador, 22% (National Electoral Council, 2009) and in Colombia, 50% (MOE, 2011).

Abstention is a source of concern in politics, considering that greater political participation generates greater democracy, which seems to be particularly characteristic of participatory democracy (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010; Sabucedo, 1988). It can be said that the democratic political system revolves around voter turnout. Moreover, it has been argued that this element differentiates democratic political systems from authoritarian ones (Bennet & Bennet, 1986). Society is linked to the State through voting.

The role of voting in modern democracies, therefore, is the legitimation of a government through consensus, besides being a useful tool to set clear limits to political leaders, who are subject to citizen scrutiny (Peña, 2006). Our understanding of voting is based on the postulates presented by Universidad de Nuevo León (1988), namely: a) it is an act of a legal nature; b) it is universal, since those who meet the requirement of being citizens have the right to vote regardless of race, gender, education or beliefs; c) it is free for the voter, because it involves no pressure or coercion of any kind; d) it is secret, which minimizes pressure once it is cast; e) it is direct, because it allows the citizen to choose without any intermediation and f) it is personal and non-transferable, given that citizens must exercise their right to vote by themselves and no citizen can vote on behalf of another.

The conditions associated to voting behavior give more emphasis to certain aspects than others, depending on the theoretical stance. For this research, three types of information will be triangulated in order to evaluate their relationship with voting behavior: a) demographic characteristics of voters and non-voters; b) psychosocial characterization of the population in terms of the psychological and social aspects that guide their political participation, and c) identification of the most effective political marketing strategies to persuade the voting population.

## Sociodemographic variables and their relationship with voting behavior

The first studies on voter characterization emphasized the impact of the socialization process of citizens in their families, workplaces and neighborhoods and provided some basic characteristics of the voters observed, such as age, gender and social status. Although recent research shows that the variables associated to the first models of this kind have lost some of their explanatory power, most of their approaches are still valid in political science (Hoskin, Masías & Galvis, 2005). Various aspects of each variable were analyzed with the national and international sources mentioned below.

### *Age*

The most commonly evaluated criterion in democratic systems is maturity in biological terms, which guarantees the voters' ability and motivation to participate. These two aspects have been evaluated by Wagner, Johann and Kritzinger (2012) based on turnout of 16-year-olds in Austria (the only country in Europe where people younger than 18 can vote). No differences were found between turnout of people under 18 and the rest of the population, although lower participation is reported.

In the Colombian context, studies on young voters have found that political affiliations have their origin in family values instilled at an early age (Gutiérrez & Ramírez, 2002; Peña, 2006). This feature seems much more evident in young people who are affiliated to the so-called extreme political parties, as suggested by Coffé & Voorpostel (2010) in their studies about political preferences and attitudes of children of far-right party supporters in Switzerland. These researchers identified similarities between parents and children in terms of party identification, immigration issues and perception of the European Union. They also highlight the important role of mothers when it comes to influencing girls.

### *Gender*

The gender variable and its relationship with voting behavior has at least two related aspects. On the one hand, it analyzes whether one gender participates more often. On the other hand,

it examines if there is a tendency to elect candidates based on their gender. This second aspect is essential in terms of guaranteeing the so-called equal electoral quotas, which means having equal representation in government instances. Quotas are at least 30% in all countries in the region, except Argentina (Cepal, 2008).

Karp & Banducci (2008) analyzed data from a comparative study on electoral systems and evaluated in particular if the election of women in national legislatures influenced female political participation and attitudes towards the electoral system in 35 countries (Brazil, Mexico and Spain were included). The study found gender differences in many countries in regards to political participation, as well as in positive attitudes towards the electoral process. It also found that the presence of women in representative positions was weakly associated to a better attitude towards the electoral process. It also concluded that both men and women had that better perception.

In the Colombian case, while the national survey on political culture (DANE, 2008) did not find any gender differences in voter turnout, 59% of men and women stated that they vote every time they can. Such information is inconsistent with the results on Colombian voters' profile by the Electoral Observation Mission, which compares voters' characteristics with the total population who may vote in the country. Profile information shows that although women are the majority in the country (51,8%) and on the electoral roll (51,9%), men exercise their right to vote 2,4% more (MOE, 2011).

With respect to the above, three arguments can be used to explain women's low political participation. The first is the socialization theory, which argues that differences in early social learning among men and women make women have a more passive political role than men. The second explanation is the situational theory, which refers to the adult socialization of women, who prioritize the care of their children and household and this deters them from engaging in political activities. Finally, the third explanation is the structural theory. It states that a small proportion of women is part of socioeconomic groups that participate more often in politics due to their professional occupations, which implies higher education and income (Tong, 2003).

### *Educational level*

Concerning education, studies have identified a positive relationship between the educational level and political participation. It means that citizens' higher education levels increase their chances of participation in the political process and therefore they will be involved in various political activities. This variable is also key to understand political capacity, heterogeneity of political ideas and political interest as features of this population group (Gozzo & D'Agata, 2010). Therefore, this variable is critical to the political participation process.

In Colombia, an analysis by the Electoral Observation Mission (2011) identifies the following voter profile according to their educational level. People with higher education degrees tend to vote at a higher rate. 16,1% of total active voters have a high educational level, while at the national level these people only represent 12% of the population.

### *Occupation*

Being part of the economically active population but also being unemployed can alter an individual's voting behavior. According to Jahoda (1987), unemployed individuals lack individual and organizational strength. If a country has high unemployment rates, individuals can accept their personal life and social affairs resignedly, which can lead to political consequences if the candidates promise increased employment opportunities.

### *Religion*

Voters' religious affiliation has been seen as an important variable to understand voting, taking into account its closeness to "long-term" ideological features or the parties' political principles. Thus, for example in Western cultures, right-wing parties identify themselves more commonly with Judeo-Christian religious tenets. In the Colombian context, this is the case for the Conservative Party. Other groups identify themselves with those beliefs to a lesser extent and have more neutral political ideas, as is the case for center or left parties (for example, the Liberal Party and the Alternative Democratic Pole). In this country, religious affiliation and its political implications characterized "La Violencia" political conflict in the 40's and 50's. During that period, Conservatives were involved

with the Orthodox practice of the Catholic religion, partly due to the role of the Colombian Catholic church in that conflict. The Liberals were seen as atheists who were dangerous for social order (Arce, 2005; Posada, 2006).

## Psychosocial variables

One of the pillars of this research is the psychological perspective. For this reason, the variables chosen to study young voters and abstainers are discussed below.

### *Political socialization*

Habit creation implies one or several environments where behavior is socially reinforced. According to Castillo (2000), an individual's birth and inclusion to social life occurs in his family. Families are also in charge of teaching norms and values that are fundamental for communities (Ramos, 1990).

In terms of the interaction with primary socialization actors (nuclear and extended family) and secondary ones (school and work), it can be said that when a young person's family participates in politics, he or she has the chance to learn from direct involvement in political activities during early life. As young people enter the work force after completing their undergraduate studies, they will most likely get involved in politics.

### *Attitudes*

Attitudes are specific ways to respond to circumstances of the environment. They are what we feel, what we think and what we do with regard to objects, people and groups. This form of interaction is not genetic randomness, but it is learned from the individuals' primary socialization process and from social interactions with parents and members of the groups where they belong (González et al., 2005; Murillo, 1984), although not exclusively. In his analysis of the Canadian electoral system, Cutler (2007) identifies contextual influences on political attitudes (opinions and feelings) directly associated with neighborhoods' economic conditions shared by residents, even when politics is not a conversation topic in social interaction and without direct contact with political information through the media.

In general, attitudes about different topics tend to be positive or negative. In the case of the

electoral system, the citizens' degree of political distrust can be seen as a result of the negative attitudes of individuals towards political leaders and the government, while confidence in the political system makes individuals accept power and get involved with the national political system (Sabucedo, 1996).

### *Political commitment*

As a political behavior, it is closely related to identity features of political groups and the individuals' identity. Thus, according to Duque et al. (2011), political commitment emerges as a result of empathy with one of the parties in the political system. Some of the elements of the party system are their existing number, interrelations, ideologies and strategies, which determine how they interact with the environment and their social basis.

### *Political effectiveness*

Another psychological dimension that has been studied in terms of its impact on voting behavior is the political attitude called political effectiveness. It can be of two kinds: a) internal efficiency, in which individuals analyze their ability to have an impact on the system and it can be seen as a self-evaluation on participation in political life; b) external efficiency, where individuals assess the system's sensitivity to their actions or those of other individuals (Wolsfeld, 1986).

Thus, four types of individuals can be found: inactive, which have low internal and external effectiveness; conformists, who value institutional effectiveness but not for mobilization purposes; dissidents, who value the effectiveness of mobilization but not at the institutional level, and pragmatists, who are highly efficient (Sabucedo, 1996).

## Political Marketing

Political advertising appeared in the media in the 1950s. The use of the media available has been fundamental for electoral battles in democratic systems. Political advertising through the media affects its neutrality, because it is used by political strategy as a tool to promote certain attitudes in specific audiences in order to favor one candidate in particular and harm the image of contenders.

Political parties and electoral campaigns use strategies, as any commercial company.

Therefore, their goals may be similar. For example, a commercial company may want to position a product as the market's leader. In the case of political parties, this may be seen as obtaining power. Political marketing seeks to deliberately adapt the message of parties to the needs and desires of the "market" (the electorate) through the use of different marketing and consumer psychology strategies such as focus groups for message adaptation, among others (Scammell, 1995). Thus, political marketing implements a set of techniques to identify the needs of the electoral market. For this purpose, it creates a message with solutions provided by a candidate who customizes a program to solve those needs, supported and boosted by political advertising (Barranco, 1982).

The most important topics in the field of political marketing and their relationship with voting behavior are presented below.

### *Mass Media*

The relationship between the media and political participation in general is considered in at least three different senses (Vega, 2010). a) The media informs the audience about the agenda to be discussed during political campaigns. b) The media discusses the topics and citizens judge public figures and candidates based on them. c) The media socializes the political views of different groups and political actors, while individuals find in the media groups that they identify with and cast their vote according to their affinities.

It is important to clarify that the first interpretation framework for individuals is the image of the media itself, so assessment of the news or informed facts will be influenced by this variable. Such influence relates directly to media credibility in the eyes of the individual and the information obtained through other channels (Lopez, 1991). In the case of political information consumed by young people, Echeverria (2011) says that they consume scarce political information through the media, usually television, but with deep distrust. Echeverria's study also reports that young people have genuine political concerns and claim for media clarity and simple public information, so that the formal features of journalistic language, which differ from the speech of young people, do not become a factor that excludes them from accessing political information.

### *Political campaigns*

In the advertising field, political parties plan campaigns depending on their economic resources. For this reason, they have to select media and advertising in terms of their profitability, according to the audience of each means (Lopez, 1991).

Advertising for political campaigns is a set of specific techniques that involves developing content for the media. They are intended to publicize an election manifesto, a candidate's profile or the advantages of a political party, in order to convince the electorate and capture their votes in the political market (Barranco, 1982).

### *Candidate's Image*

Nowadays, verbal and non-verbal actions in political marketing have an important role in society. A specific case is that of images that can create and recreate social representations. Politicians, singers, footballers or any public figure engage in systematic syncretism when they legitimize, define and characterize roles with some regularity in society (Del Valle & Portilla, 2010).

A candidate's image can be studied from two perspectives: the one determined by newscasters and the one built by the receiver. Therefore, image is studied from two points of view: what the candidate projects to influence voters and what is perceived by voters about the candidate (Martin, 2002).

### *Discourse*

In political contests, discourse is a persuasive tool. Language is used to generate social influence in a particular direction (Dorna, 1991). The use of language influences the acquisition, learning or modification of political ideologies. These ideologies are learnt after reading and listening to other people's (family, friends and the media, among others) oral or written discourse (Van Dijk, 2003). Therefore, discourse becomes a practical, social and cultural phenomenon used in social acts for the interaction of individuals (Van Dijk, 2000).

Discourse structure and order are determined by the hierarchy of the actions expressed by it. In political discourse, this is called social function hierarchy. It classifies the topics that the candidate wants to present to persuade the audience into micro and macro issues (Van Dijk, 2000).

## Method

### Design

This study follows a cross-sectional, non-experimental design, since data collection was done at a single point in time (Hernandez, Fernandez & Baptista, 1991).

### Type of Study

This is a descriptive/survey research (Montero & León, 2002), with questions containing nominal and textual measurement levels.

### Participants

Non-probability sampling was used and the selection criteria were: 1) being between 18 and 25 years old and 2) being a university student. Aspects related to gender, socioeconomic strata or semesters completed were not taken into account. 273 surveys were conducted at Fundación Universitaria Cafam and Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogota campus.

### Variables

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the relationship between sociodemographic, psychosocial and political marketing variables (predictor variables) with voter turnout, particularly during the 2010 presidential election (criterion variable).

### Instrument

A personal survey with 54 questions (51 closed and 3 open questions) was used for data collection. They covered the variables described earlier.

### Procedure

The research procedure followed three phases. In the first phase the theoretical framework was constructed in order to clarify the concepts to be analyzed. Also, points of view from different disciplines were established. In the second phase, the methodology to collect and analyze the data that would allow us to do our empirical research was determined. The results were analyzed in the

third phase. The analysis is described in detail in the data analysis section.

### Data Analysis

These are the results of data analysis. First, the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample were established based on the descriptive statistics of the population. For each dimension evaluated (sociodemographic variables, psychosocial variables and political marketing), frequency of occurrence was identified. Through a chi-squared test, logistic regression models were built to identify the extent of prediction of the dimensions and sub-dimensions in electoral participation behavior.

### Results

The main descriptive statistics for each variable are shown below, as well as a logistic regression for each aspect evaluated (sociodemographic dimension, psychosocial dimension and political marketing) with a fitted model that includes the significant variables in each dimension.

#### Sociodemographic variables

Most young people in the sample are between 20 and 21 years old (37%). The second group is formed by young people aged 18, 19 and 22 (14%, 13%, 13% respectively). The third group includes ages 23, 24 and 25 (9%, 5% and 9%, respectively). Regarding the gender variable, the survey was mostly answered by men (64%). In terms of socioeconomic level, most participants belong to the middle class (50%), 28% belong to the low socioeconomic level and 22% are part of the upper class.

After the descriptive analysis, sociodemographic variables were compared to the criterion variable, which for this study corresponds to the 2010 presidential elections. The model was constructed based on the following considerations: the criterion variable (voter turnout) was analyzed in a dichotomous way (1 = vote, 0 = no vote). This data was evaluated against the model in order to find if sociodemographic variables are predictors of that variable. The only significant variables for predicting political participation when analyzed separately are age and gender. The relationship

**TABLE 1.** Sociodemographic variables (regression model)

VARIABLES OF THE EQUATION									
		B	EE	WALD	GL	SIG.	EXP(B)	90% OF C.I. FOR EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>	Age	,642	,101	40,827	1	,000	1,901	1,611	2,243
	Gender	,093	,309	,091	1	,763	1,098	,660	1,826
	Constant	-12,261	1,990	37,983	1	,000	,000		

<sup>a</sup>Variable (s) entered on step 1: age, gender

Source: Own elaboration

indicates that the likelihood to vote increases with age. As for gender, men tend to vote more than women.

Thus, for the sociodemographic variables a prediction model including age and gender was built with a 0,10 alpha significance level (table 1).

When the model that included the two significant variables was combined with the other variables, the prediction level of the voter turnout variable decreased. On the other hand, gender as the predictor variable did not reach the significance levels established. Those values were only obtained by age as a decisive factor to predict youth vote.

### Psychosocial variables

In general, in terms of participation in governance elections, schools generally have greater turnout (98%), in comparison with college voting (67%). Parliamentary elections have the greatest turnout among respondents (31%), followed by mayor elections (28%). The lowest turnout is for elections of local officials and city council members.

Concerning political socialization, discussing political issues allows young people to share different points of view. In our survey, 86% of respondents talk about politics and the people who they talk to are friends (82%), family (75%) and classmates (61%).

In terms of attitudes towards politics, we found that the perception towards the government is negative, taking into account that 67% believe that the decisions made by the government are not beneficial for Colombian society. Additionally, when respondents were asked about the worst political party, the National Integration Party (Partido de Integración Social, PIN) was most commonly mentioned, followed by the Mira Movement. When respondents were asked to mention an adjective

to describe politicians, the word “corrupt” was the most frequent (166 times).

Concerning the evaluation of the candidates’ election manifestos, we found that they are perceived as incomprehensible and that they are not followed once the candidate is elected. Regarding the implementation of a system different from the current model of democratic participation, 94% of young people believe that it is possible. When they were asked about what this system could be, the most common responses pointed to the parliamentary system.

In regards to political commitment, it was found that 40% of respondents do not have any political position, 35% belong to the center, 17% to the left and 8% to the right. Concerning the political party that participants belong to, 62% of respondents state that they have no political affiliation, 24% belongs to the Green Party (Partido Verde), 5% is affiliated to the Alternative Democratic Pole Party (Partido Polo Democrático Alternativo) and the remaining 9% is affiliated to other parties.

The predictor variables related to voter turnout (2010 presidential elections) are: voter turnout in previous polls, such as the presidential elections in 2006, mayor elections in 2003 and 2007, senate elections in 2007, governor, municipal councils and local board elections in 2007, council members and local official elections in 2007. Also, other variables focus on the democratic system and the candidate’s knowledge.

In view of the above, it can be concluded that prior political participation is the most significant variable for predicting voter turnout. If young people have voted before, their likelihood of voting in future electoral contests increases.

Subsequently, a logistic regression model was built with the variables that related more closely to voter turnout, in order to assess the impact of those independent variables and turnout in the

**TABLE 2.** Psychosocial variables (regression model)

VARIABLES OF THE EQUATION									
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>		B	S.E.	WALD	DF	SIG.	EXP(B)	90% C.I. FOR EXP(B)	
								Lower	Upper
								Sumvot	1,607
Constant	,445	,151	8,731	1	,003	1,561			

<sup>a</sup>Variable (s) entered on step 1: sumvot  
Source: Own elaboration

2010 presidential elections. A 0,10 alpha was accepted as significance level.

When variables are incorporated independently into a single model, they lose significance because there is co-linearity between them. That is why the “parceling” methodology was used. It is a statistical technique in which predictor variables are aggregated to eliminate co-linearity (Bandalos, 2002). With this aggregation of variables, a new logistic regression model was obtained, as shown in table 2.

After reviewing the results of the model, we found that the variable that adds the significant variables found in political socialization explains the criterion variable, taking into account the significance level. This implies that voter turnout in previous elections (seen as a whole, rather than as independent events) predicts positively political participation in future elections.

### Political marketing variables

Concerning political marketing, the media and other sources of information taken into account for electoral decision-making were examined. When analyzing the media used by young people to get informed about politics, it was found that the most widely used is the internet (75%), followed by written press (64%) and TV (59%).

Concerning media reliability, the most trusted source for young people is the internet (43%), followed by the press (22%). When asked

about the reliability of information provided by the media, 23% of young people said that they trust it, although this percentage is low taking into account the long exposure of young people to the media.

When respondents were asked to evaluate the characteristics of a candidate’s image, 91% of young people see intelligence as very valuable; followed by honesty (90%), conflict management (89%), transparency (87%), academic qualifications (60%) and media management (54%). The characteristics with the lowest scores were political experience (48%) and reputation (34%).

When asked about the image that a candidate should convey, young people stated that responsibility is the most relevant aspect (90%), followed by security (87%), patriotism (75%) and authority (68%). The last aspect analyzed in this variable was if a candidate’s image is relevant to be elected. 82% of young people said that it was an important feature.

Finally, concerning discourse in public debates, 94% of young people believe that a clear presentation of arguments in a presidential debate is important to decide who to vote for.

The variables that provide more information to the model are the time that young people devote to listening to the radio every day and the relevance of the candidate’s image for voter turnout on election day. Table 3 presents the model built only with these two variables. A 0,10 alpha is assumed.

**TABLE 3.** Political marketing variables (regression model)

VARIABLES OF THE EQUATION							
Step 1 <sup>a</sup>		B	SE	WALD	DF	SIG.	EXP(B)
	Image	,889	,334	7,089	1	,008	2,432
	radmincontl	-,004	,002	5,470	1	,019	,996
	Constant	,424	,302	1,971	1	,160	1,529

<sup>a</sup>Variable (s) entered on step 1: image, radmincontl.  
Source: Own elaboration.

The model obtained with these two variables still fits the accepted significance levels in both cases and therefore they are kept in the model. Additionally, it can be seen that the image variable is positive, which indicates that a better candidate image increases young people's likelihood to vote. The variable concerning the amount of time that young people spend listening to the radio every day is negative. Therefore, listening to the radio for longer time implies that young people are less likely to vote in future elections.

## Discussion

One of the results of this research is that the sociodemographic variables associated to voting behavior are age and gender. Concerning age, it is evident that university students who answered the survey are not involved with the electoral process because of the influence of the university context, where this form of political participation is not well perceived (Murillo, 1984). In addition, the first stage of the inverted-U shape is shown by the results of this research, since voting rates increase with age (Grossi et al., 2000).

Concerning the gender variable, the abstention rate is higher in women. When participation in political activities is analyzed, we can see that men have a more active participation, which confirms Molero's hypothesis (1997). Tong (2003) explains that women's low participation levels are given by their incipient political socialization. When the results of this study are compared with statistics from the Electoral Observatory Mission or MOE (2011), the proportion of men's and women's participation is the same. Also, in the study conducted by Garcia & Frutos (1999) in Spain, men have greater participation than women.

Concerning the psychosocial variables studied, there is evidence that political socialization has more weight as a predictor variable of voting behavior. Therefore, education about a country's democratic system and student governance practices, which include participation in the selection of student representatives, have an impact at the age of majority (Castillo, 2000).

However, the absence of effective mechanisms to teach young people about the democratic system and what it means to govern and to be governed, leads to a weakened political socialization process of young Colombians. There is continuity

between the educational system and socialization with social groups where they belong (family, friends, educational institutions, among others), resulting in citizens who do not participate actively in the political system (Lozano, 2008; Murillo 1984).

In terms of the attitudes reported by young people about the government, political parties and candidates, most are negative. That entails, according to Sabucedo (1996), an increase in the degree of citizens' political distrust, and therefore, lower political participation. The same can be said about the country's current democratic system, taking into account that young people believe that it is not the best option for Colombia. They think that a different type of democratic system, such as the parliamentary, would be more convenient for the country, which confirms Zovatto's (2002) findings. He argues that the popularity of such kind of system is declining in Latin America. If that is compared to the results obtained for Colombia in this study, it reinforces the idea that there is dissatisfaction with the Colombian political system.

Regarding the analysis of political marketing variables, it can be concluded that the media is the main source of political information used by young respondents. Additionally, a candidate's image was found to be the most significant variable for voting behavior in political marketing.

According to López (2004), the most widely used means of communication is television. However, according to the results obtained by this study, it is the internet. Nowadays, the internet's boom has sparked the interest of researchers like Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt (2010), who studied the impact of social networks on political behavior in Germany. The scope of our study does not delve into the impact of social networks on voting behavior, but it allows us to see that internet is the most commonly used source of information, implying that it is young people's medium of choice par excellence and that it can be used as the main vehicle to bring young people closer to politics.

In the same vein, another relevant issue posed by this research is the influence of the media. Respondents agree that the media affects directly citizens' decisions on who should be chosen. However, it is necessary to clarify that the influence depends on the credibility of that means for each individual (Lopez, 1991). Another important factor is media exposure, which in the case of respondents is quite high for television and the internet. In marketing, this aspect is vital because

it allows analysts to establish which means are more effective to present information about a candidate.

The results obtained show that the messages of advertising campaigns (for example, a campaign slogan) have no impact on voting behavior or memorability. Billboards, which are commonly used, are remembered by respondents. Concerning the candidate's image, it can be analyzed from two aspects: first, the physical image, where colors, expressions and clothes are exploited. The second aspect is the image built through discourse and what the candidate projects (Del Valle & Portilla, 2010).

Taking into account the previous approach in result analysis, three features of a candidate's image are highly valued by young people: honesty, transparency and intelligence, contrasting with the study by Williams et al. (2009) in the United States, which found that the most valuable trait of a presidential candidate for members of his or her political parties is charisma.

Discourse as a persuasion tool (Dorna, 1991) is analyzed in this study through debates, where oral and gestural discourse features are seen live and evaluated by viewers (Van Dijk & Rodrigo, 1999). According to respondents, candidates' behavior during debates is very important when it comes to voting. Additionally, as Angel (2006) puts it, tactics used by candidates may favor some of their contenders over others, and therefore they may capture votes in those scenarios. This was confirmed by Dorna's (1993) study about the case of the French candidate who lost the election after a debate got out of hand.

The role of the media is remarkable. It can influence different factors such as discourse. Consumer psychology should pay particular attention to this, as specific phenomena may develop from the distortion of political information generated by television, internet and the radio, among others. They can modify and even persuade young people to be responsible political consumers, which is an ideal scenario.

Therefore, it is necessary to reaffirm that educational institutions must draw attention to these situations and strengthen political education in basic education entities and universities to contribute to the creation of critical citizens who are aware of their role in the democratic system and their responsibility as political consumers.

Since voting focuses on a candidate and not on a political party or the image it projects, young

voters are giving the responsibility of running a country to candidates who are not properly prepared for this job, but who are closer to the electorate.

It can also be concluded that the image of Colombian politicians is worrying and that it may discourage participation if no other suitable candidates are available, or if young people's perception of politicians does not change.

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