Televised Debates, Second Screens, and Filter Bubbles
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TV Debates in Context: Past & Present

1960
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Second Screening

Second screening

= ”bundle of practices that involve integrating, and switching across and between, live broadcast and social media”

(Vaccari et al. 2015)

► increasingly popular in general
► most prominent during media events
► motivations for second screening: discuss, get further information and gauge others’ opinions
Filter Bubbles

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= communicative spaces in which “content is selected by algorithms according to a viewer’s previous behaviors” (Bakshy et al. 2015), thereby providing “content an individual is likely to agree with” (Flaxman et al. 2016).
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▶ Homophily on social media platforms is a thing, ...
▶ ... but there is a fair chance that users get confronted with attitude-discordant contents.
▶ Unexplored: Effects of Filter Bubbles on perception of political information. Why is that?
   ▶ Idiosyncratic information environments: unobservable from outside and hard to generalize their features
   ▶ Endogeneity: self-selection into exposure makes effect estimation through purely observational data pretty much impossible
Televised Debates and Filter Bubbles

Candidate Evaluation
Televised Debates and Filter Bubbles
RQ1:
Do the subjects “accurately” perceive the tone of the filter bubble they are in?
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▶ Identifying the tone of filter bubble = highly complex task
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- Different modes of information processing possible (Schulz & Roessler 2012)
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- Different modes of information processing possible (Schulz & Roessler 2012)
  - quasi-statistical sense
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▶ Identifying the tone of filter bubble = highly complex task
▶ Different modes of information processing possible (Schulz & Roessler 2012)
  ▶ quasi-statistical sense
  ▶ looking-glass perception
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RQ2:
Do the biased information environments influence the perception of the candidates’ performances?
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- Televised debates are highly complex → need for heuristics
- Pre-existing attitudes towards candidates/parties
- Viewers geared by other users’ opinions (social influence theory):
  - Political attitudes in general (Levitan & Verhulst 2016) and candidate evaluation in televised debates shown to be susceptible to social influence
  - Social influence can occur in computer-mediated communication spaces (see Maruyama et al. 2017)
Methodological innovation: Laboratory Live-Experiment on German televised debate 2017
Study Design

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- Between-subjects design with three different twitter walls containing real tweets
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Between-subjects design with three different twitter walls containing real tweets

Sample: 119 participants highly educated and rather young, balanced in gender
Study Design

- Methodological innovation: Laboratory Live-Experiment on German televised debate 2017
- Between-subjects design with three different twitter walls containing real tweets
- Sample: 119 participants highly educated and rather young, balanced in gender
- Random assignment worked, but coincidental deviations in party ID
Study Design

Twitter: Stream-API

#tvduell + merkel OR #tvduell + schulz

Instant Analysis

Live coding with trained coders

3 Twitter Walls

Schulz-leaning

68% Pro-Schulz + Anti-Merkel
32% Pro-Merkel + Anti-Schulz

Neutral

55% Pro-Schulz + Anti-Merkel
45% Pro-Merkel + Anti-Schulz

Merkel-leaning

36% Pro-Schulz + Anti-Merkel
64% Pro-Merkel + Anti-Schulz
RQ1: Perception of the Filter Bubble tone

Question
Recalling the tweets you could observe during the debate: Altogether, how was [Angela Merkel/Martin Schulz] portrayed in those messages from your point of view?

1 = very negative; 5 = very positive
RQ1: Perception of the Filter Bubble tone

DV: Tone on Twitter Wall towards Candidates

Tone Merkel
Adj. $R^2 = 0.182$

Tone Schulz
Adj. $R^2 = 0.126$
RQ2: Effects on candidate evaluation

Question

Altogether, how did [Angela Merkel/Martin Schulz] perform during the debate?

1 = very bad; 5 = very good
RQ2: Effects on candidate evaluation

DV: Debate Performance of Candidates

Performance Merkel
Adj. R^2 = 0.119

Performance Schulz
Adj. R^2 = 0.143

- Age
- Female
- Party ID: CDU/CSU
- Party ID: SPD
- Merkel-leaning Wall
- Schulz-leaning Wall
Conclusion

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- Implications: Filter Bubble effects opening ways to influence political attitudes through organized collective actions on social media channels (”Hijacking the filter bubble”)

Upcoming: Survey Experiment (positive vs. negative tweets)
Subjects are able to determine the tone of their filter bubble in a quasi-statistical manner; however: unexplained variation merits further investigation.

Filter bubble effect only for Martin Schulz → effects contingent on external factors (e.g. pre-existing knowledge about candidate).

Implications: Filter Bubble effects opening ways to influence political attitudes through organized collective actions on social media channels (“Hijacking the filter bubble”)

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References

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