



Election Debate Visualisation

New Modes of Engagement with Televised Political Debates through Audience Feedback

EDV Project Briefing 2014.04

October 2014

edv-project.net

Social media have multiplied the channels of sensory streams available to the public audience of political debates.

But is this new “participation experience” truly informative? Do social media voices really capture the richness of citizens’ reactions to political debates?

The EDV project contributes new methods and tools to actively involve the audience and make the televised debate experience more engaging and informative.

The widespread diffusion of ubiquitous computing and social media is transforming citizens’ experience of political debates. The way people engage with televised political debates today is progressively shifting from “passive” viewing of a television programme, to “active”, and non-necessarily synchronous, participation to a wider media debate around a televised event. Social media are key players in this change, because they multiply the channels of sensory streams available to the public audience of political debates. But is this new “participation experience” really informative? To what extent does it improve citizens’ confidence about the issues discussed? And most importantly, do social media voices truly capture the richness of citizens’ reactions to political debates? What could we learn about the audience of political election debate, and about the debate as media event, if we had better analytical tools to scrutinise audience’s understanding and reactions? A specific research strand in the EDV project is devoted to the study of the audience, and the ways in which it can be more proactively engaged in the debate experience. EDV will propose new ways to capture the richness and variety of citizens’ reactions to political debates, which are often difficult to interpret from existing social media feedback and analysis. Building on Collective Intelligence

approaches EDV will develop and test new methods and tools to harness audience feedback in terms of how aesthetically, emotionally, intellectually and critically engaged they are; and will then use these feedback to better understand the audience's needs, and assess the debate as media event. This research will also contribute to advance our understanding of the limitations, risks and potentials of using social media technologies for citizen engagements in televised political debates.

Collective Intelligence and the passive/active dimension in the articulation of audience

"Disputes on the nature of the audience seem to involve two related dialectics. The first is a tension between the idea that the audience is a mass public versus the idea that is a small community. The second is the tension between the idea that the audience is passive versus the belief that it is active"...." the audience cannot be characterized as an amorphous mass, [rather] it consists of numerous highly differentiated [but interconnected] communities each with its own values, ideas and interests"

(Littlejohn in 'Theories of Human Communication', 1996:310-311)ⁱⁱ

Collective intelligence is a new umbrella term used to express the augmented functions that can be enabled and emerge by the co-existence of more people in the same environment (in virtual, real-life or blended settings)ⁱ. As defined by MIT Centre for Collective Intelligence, collective intelligence aims at investigating "How can people and computers be connected so that—collectively—they act more intelligently than any individuals, groups, or computers have ever done before?"ⁱⁱⁱ. If we look at the media debate as a blended interaction environment, EDV aims to apply CI principles to the social policy context and explore new ways to harness the collective intelligence of televised political debate audience.

Specifically, in the context of EDV, face-to-face and digital participatory methods are being designed and experimented in order to investigate ways to actively involve the audience in a new watching experience of the election debates. The main mechanism of audience's engagement proposed consists of enabling viewers' feedback to the live or post-hoc video replay of a televised political debate.

Enabling viewers' feedback has three main objectives:

- **promoting active engagement** by enabling the audience to react to the televised debates in new non-intrusive, yet expressive, and timely manner;
- harnessing and analysing viewers' reactions to **better understand the audience and their debate experience**;
- providing new metrics to **assess the debate as media event** in terms of its capability to engage the audience **aesthetically, emotionally, intellectually and critically**.

“Soft Feedbacks”: What they are and how can they capture the richness of citizens’ reactions to political debates



The viewers’ feedbacks we aim to capture have the following characteristics, they:

- are not intrusive to the viewing experience;
- capture rich nuances of meanings and reactions;
- are easy to understand and use;
- are specific to the aspects of political communication we want to measure.

In design terms, they can be defined as “soft” feedback, in the sense of the lightness of their affordance and the sophistication of their details, which enables a rich picture of audience’s reactions to televised political debates.

To test the soft feedback idea we designed an experiment in which audience reactions were captured by using flashcards. Flashcards consist of paper cards containing textual information and are often used in learning contexts for memory training. We used them to help viewers to reflect on the specific “concepts” captured by the flashcard text. The flashcards’ spaced order and repetition was used as a method to help participants in memorising the cards. Card’s colour, and typographic style were also carefully designed to help participants to easily focus on the key concept captured by the card. We used as test-bed the second political debate between Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage about whether the UK should be in or out of the EU (one hour debate hosted by BBC television on April 2th 2014 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-26443312>).

A study was run with 15 Leeds University students in which participants were asked to watch the political debate and raise the flashcards as the debate unfolded. The aim of the cards was to elicit three main types of reactions to the speakers’ utterances: emotional, trust, and information needs reactions. Students were asked to raise the flashcard that most represented their “feeling” toward what was being said by the politicians during the debate. This procedure was repeated throughout

the entire debate allowing the participants to raise the cards as many times as they



wanted, whenever any event during the debate triggered any reaction from their side. The entire experiment was video recorded. Subsequently the video was processed to manually index card-lifting events, and annotate each

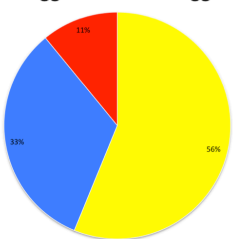
event with codes identifying the different flashcards.

Over 1470 flashcard lifting events were recorded and coded according to 18 flashcard codes. Flashcard usage was then analysed both per student and globally for all participants. Different visual analytics have been produced to show the percentage of flashcard usage, its distribution per time, and per speaker's utterance. Interesting comparisons can be also done between speakers' performance.

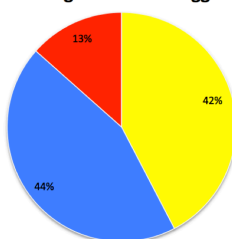
What can we learn by capturing nuanced and non-intrusive audience feedback?

Initial results of the quantitative analysis show that, overall, Farage provoked stronger emotional reactions than Clegg, whereas Clegg triggered more trust-related reactions (see pie chart on the right hand side). Looking more in depth at

Cleggs's reaction triggers



Farage's reaction triggers



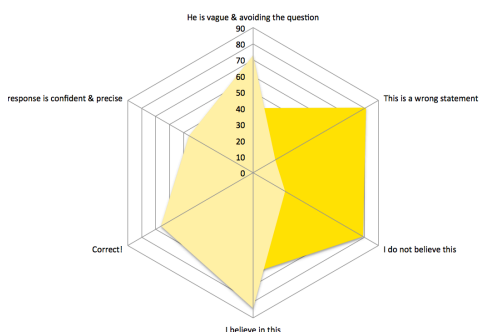
■ Trust Cards
■ Questions Cards
■ Emotion Cards

the analysis of types of flashcard lifting per speaker utterance, we can infer that emotional reactions toward Farage were rather negative (with cards such as "This is so sad" and "This is unnerving" accounting for over 70 flashcard liftings). On the contrary, Nick Clegg came out as trustworthy (see the distribution of trust flashcards, the yellow spider diagram on the following page). Participants overall "believed" what he said (85 flashcards lifting), and found his statements "correct"

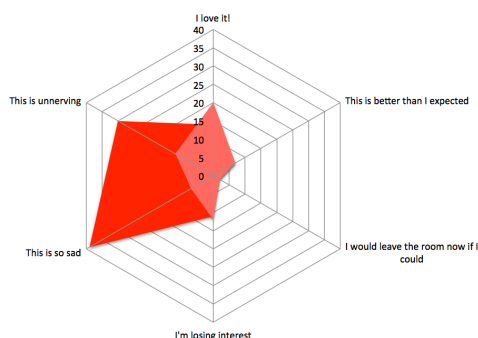
(65 flashcard liftings), even though in many cases he has been considered "vague and avoiding questions" (70 flashcard liftings). Farage's claims, on the other end, were often "not believed" to be true (80 flashcard liftings), and his statements were often considered "wrong" by the audience (80 flashcard liftings).

Looking at information need elicitation cards we can also see that Clegg's spider diagram surface (in light blue) is completely included in Farage's (in dark blue).

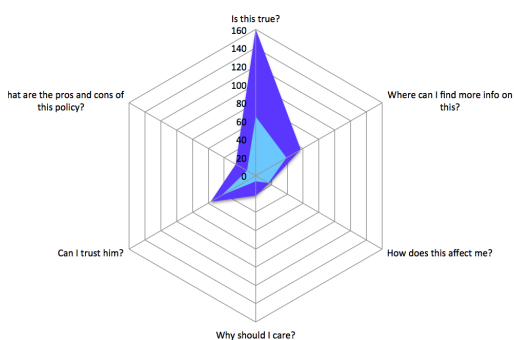
**Trust based reactions to statements
Farage (dark) and Clegg (light)**



**Emotion based reactions to statements
Farage (dark) and Clegg (light)**

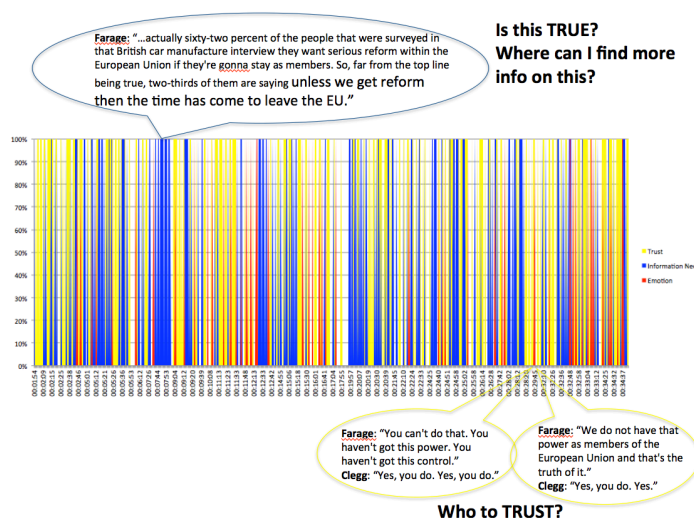


**Information need reactions to statements
Farage (dark) and Clegg (light)**



Audience questioned almost three time more often the credibility of Farage's statements compared to Clegg's (160 "is this true" cards were lifted, compared to only 60 cards lifted in reaction to Clegg's utterances). It is also interesting to notice that, overall, participants did not require more information neither on speakers' credibility, nor on how the debated topics could relate to their personal life ("Why should I care?" and "How does this affect me" flashcards were rarely used). Also, the interest in "knowing the pro and con of the discussed policy" was low, even though this could be due to the fact that the debate was not explicitly about a new policy proposal so the flashcard text could have been misleading in this case. Finally, a timeline representation of flashcards lifting events is being plotted as a way to spot critical debate moments. By looking at the events' lines distribution along time (image below), and by spotting condensation of colours, we can isolate specific fragments of time in which the speakers' statements have provoked strong audience reactions. For instance from min 0.7 to 0.8 of the televised debate programme a spike of blue cards is notable. Participants required more information on the authenticity of Farage claim "...unless we get reform then the time has come to leave the EU" ("Is this true?", "Where can I find more info on this?"). A pick of yellow-red cards is also noticeable at min 28-29 of the televised programme, when Farage and Clegg kept contradicting each other leaving the audience confused on whom to trust.

Future research will be devoted to the comparison of the audience's reactions captured by the flashcards with the live reactions captured by social media. We aim to find out if social media and flashcards feedback identify similar critical events within the televised debate, and compare the type of insights that can be inferred by using one or the other method to assess audience engagement, understanding, and appreciation of the political debate.



Harnessing audience feedback at scale

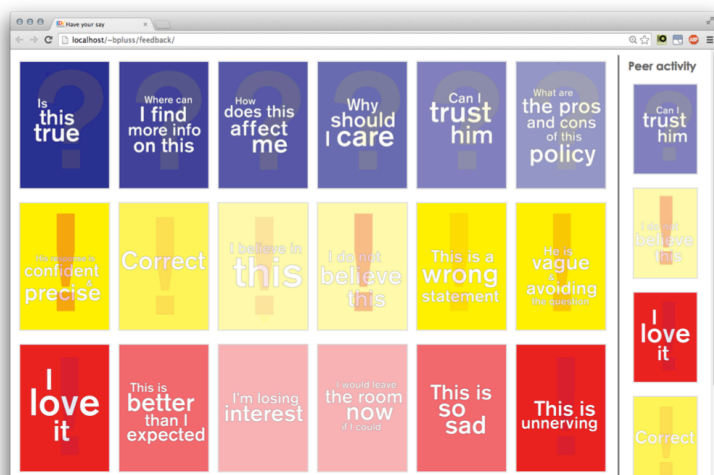
The use of paper-prototype flashcards to harness audience feedback showed promising results in terms of active engagement and appreciation from the audience involved, but it also presents limitations in terms of costs of event organisation and data analysis, which makes it hard to scale. For this reasons a mobile app is under development, to allow feedback gathering from a larger

audience. The mobile app will replicate the successful design choices from the paper flashcard experiment (such as colours, cards' layout, and typographical design) and will include the re-design of flashcard text to capture new dimensions of the political communication process. Specifically we'll design one deck of cards for each of the democratic entitlements identified in the EDV focus groups research (see EDV Project Briefing 2014.01). We'll use soft feedback analysis to investigate and measure which democratic entitlement is triggered at specific time of the political debate and by specific political topics and actors.

We plan to replicate the soft feedback gathering experiment with flashcards in a virtual distributed setting by using the mobile app. We also aim to re-test the face-to-face flashcard experiment with the new Democratic Entitlements flashcards in order to compare the strengths and limitations of face-to-face and virtual methodology. Guidelines will be provided on how to use soft feedback, flashcard methods and tools, to harness audience reactions to political debates in different contexts, and with different audience sizes.

EDV Research Team

Stephen Coleman , Simon Buckingham Shum, Anna De Liddo, Giles Moss, Brian Plüss, Paul Wilson.



ⁱ De Liddo, A., Sándor, Á., & Buckingham Shum, S., 2012. 'Contested collective intelligence: Rationale, technologies, and a human-machine annotation study'. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*, 21(4-5), 417-448.

ⁱⁱ Littlejohn, S. W., 1996. *Theories of human communication*. Belmont: Wadsworth.

ⁱⁱⁱ Malone, T. W., Laubacher, R., & Dellarocas, C.. 2009. 'Harnessing crowds: Mapping the genome of collective intelligence'.

