Collective Intelligence Meets the Political Agenda: Enhancing Election Debates to Foster Viewers' Engagement

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The Web is changing the way citizens engage with the political agenda. Following the emergence of social media, political events are now *surrounded* by real-time reactions and analyses from viewers, political actors, mainstream media and other social organisations. For instance, the Clegg v. Farage EU debates earlier this year and the more recent Salmond v. Darling Scotland debates were accompanied by considerable social media activity, real-time sentiment analysis of tweets, live-blogging from politics correspondents, viewers' comments on the broadcasting websites and web polls. *Full Fact*[1] and the BBC checked in real-time the truthfulness of the politicians' claims and posted their findings on Twitter and on their websites.

On the one hand, this online activity contributes to the common good. Focus groups research carried out by our partners in political communication at the University of Leeds[2] has looked into citizen responses to the televised 2010 Election Debates, and into their hopes for how the 2015 debates might be improved. Five democratic entitlements and capabilities were identified (see sidebar) as central to the citizen's experience of – and ability to engage with – the General Election. Reactions and analyses in social media are a means to address some of these entitlements. They allow for citizens and organisations to communicate their positions, becoming actors in the event, rather than mere observers.

1. To be respected as a rational and independent decision-maker
2. To be able to evaluate political claims and make an informed decision
3. To feel part of the debate as a democratic cultural event
4. To be able to communicate with and be recognised by the leaders who want to represent me
5. To be able to make a difference to what happens in the political world

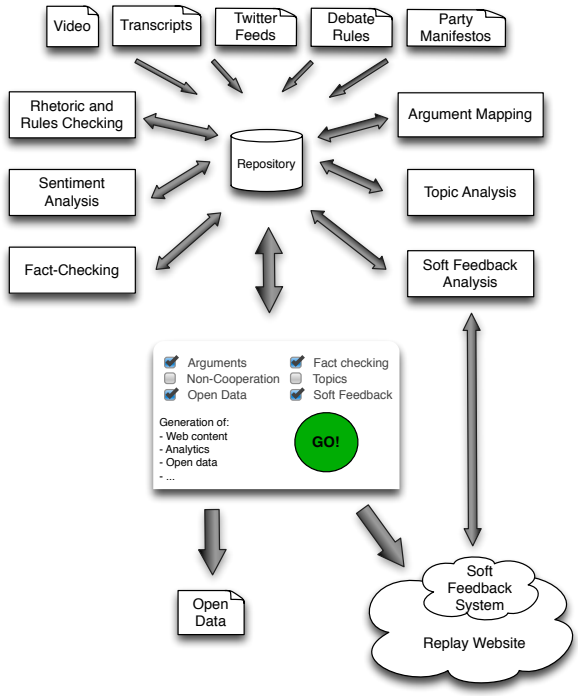
On the other hand, the multiplicity of voices and the information in constant flow with no clear organisation can result overwhelming to viewers and hinder their understanding of the event. Also, the legitimacy of the messages is unclear, as citizens will not necessarily trust the individuals and organisations they originate from. Technology can help address these drawbacks, e.g. by structuring the information flow in customisable channels synchronised around the videos and by harnessing the collective intelligence of the viewers in order to produce or filter the contents.

We anticipate a future in which events such as election debates will be enriched by an unpredictable range of additional information streams from individuals and organisations, ranging from additional live reaction as events unfold, to retrospectively added resources which can be

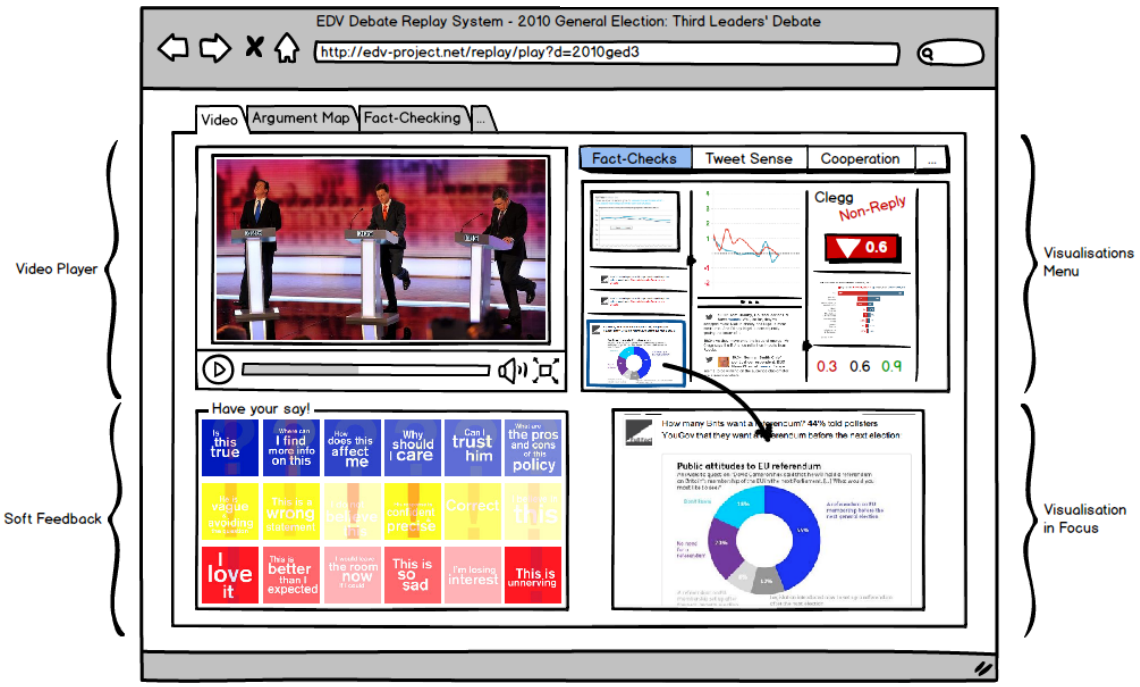
[1] http://fullfact.org
[2] http://edv-project.net/team

more reflective, and hence possibly higher quality. The EPSRC Electoral Debate Visualisation (EDV) Project[3] is aimed at developing an online video replay platform during the 2015 UK General Election, in which party leadership debates are linked to customisable visualisation channels to enhance viewers' experience and hopefully encourage citizen engagement.

EDV is designing an information-architecture (right) to harness the collective intelligence around a debate. Enhanced debate videos could be produced with a particular audience and purpose in mind, selecting the channels that would be more appealing.



As an example, the mockup below enables viewer feedback through the buttons under the video. Viewers can signal, e.g. Is this true? How does this affect me? I love it. He's avoiding the question (see more on this in the next page). Aggregate statistics could be shown once a user had expressed their views. In addition, several channels on the right show third-party sources such as fact checking, twitter, or violation of the 'rules of the debate'. A viewer could select those channels she is more interested in.



We are currently implementing three of these channels, but we envisage a future in which viewers are both source and target of the enhancements added to the debate videos.

[3] http://edv-project.net

Argument mapping

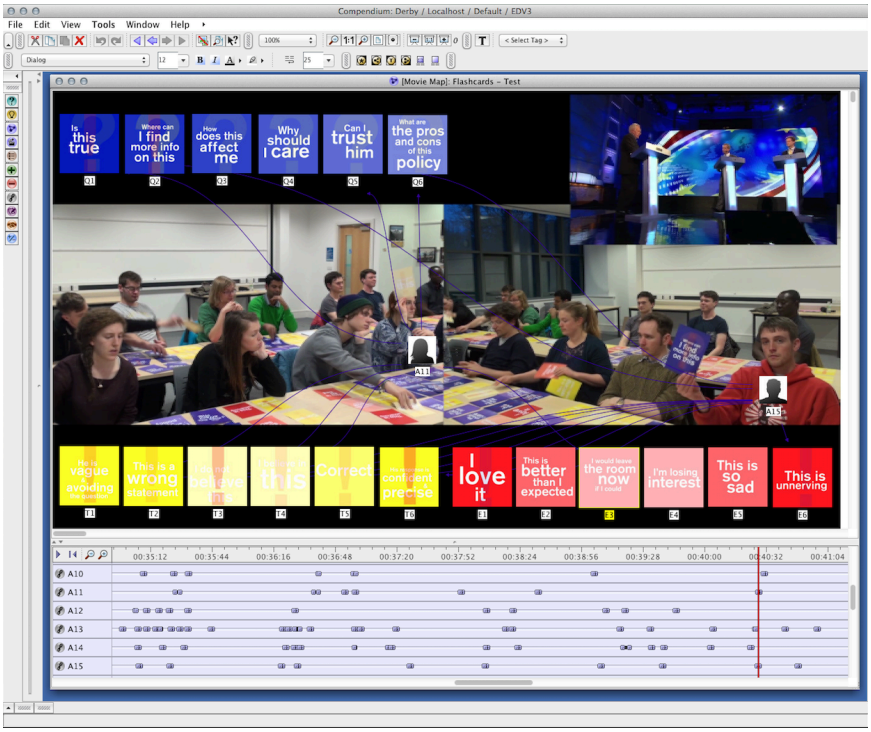
Argument visualisation technologies (Buckingham Shum, 2003) can assist viewers in understanding how issues are being framed, who claims to have a solution, how contributions support and challenge each other, and what evidence, if any, is appealed to, or could be connected. Moreover, we can show who attacked/supported who on which issues. We have a way to see the 'skeleton' structure of the moves being made. In recent years, argumentation research has progressively shifted from individual experts mappers to argument mapping as an online collaborative effort (Buckingham Shum, 2008; De Liddo and Buckingham Shum, 2010; 2013; De Liddo et al., 2014).
A challenge for the EDV project is how to integrate collective argument maps coherently as one of the channels in the Election Debate Replay website.

Rhetoric and rules of the game

A novel modelling and visualisation approach we have developed is based on an analysis of the candidates' rhetoric to detect instances in which they fail to obey the rules of the game for political debates (Plüss, 2010; 2013). This is analogous to detecting fallacies in natural argumentation and would allow viewers to "see", for instance, when a politician is failing to answer a question or purposefully making a "soundbite" remark. This is currently a semi-automated process, depending on human annotation prior to automated analysis and on the specification of a set of rules of the politicians' expected behavior in election debates. So far the annotations and the specification of the rules are carried out by trained experts. An open question is whether these could be harnessed from a collective of viewers.

Viewer feedback

EDV is exploring a novel approach to eliciting audience feedback during a cultural event. We run an experiment in which 15 viewers were given a deck of 18 coloured cards, representing a range of statements and questions under the categories of Trust (yellow), Emotion (red) and Information Need (blue). The setup for the experiment and the coding in Compendium are shown below.



Preliminary qualitative analysis shows that engagement with the cards was encouragingly high throughout the debate. We are currently carrying out an in-depth quantitative analysis in order to determine the suitability of the card deck design, the scalability of the approach and how it compares with other tools for feedback elicitation.

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