

Social media as a political backchannel:

Twitter use during televised election debates in Norway

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Introduction

Twitter has within few years become a prominent “backchannel” for televised political debates by making audience reactions visible online. By adding a specific hashtag to their tweets, Twitter users can take part in larger, public conversations about an event, reaching outside their own network of followers and followees to join the “virtual lounge room” (Harrington, 2012). The # character is used in conjunction with a word or a phrase in order to connect the tweet to a particular theme. It allows for coordinated distributed discussion on the Twitter platform. Hence, audiences can easily turn television watching into communal, social events. As social reactions to TV shows become visible through Twitter, it allows for examination of the Twitter users’ response to electoral debates in near real-time (Mascaro et al., 2012). Several studies (Twitter, 2012; Bruns and Burgess, 2011; Larsson and Moe, 2011; Diakopoulos and Shamma, 2010; Elmer, 2012; Bruns and Burgess, 2011; Larsson and Moe, 2011) have shown how Twitter has been used as a platform for continued response sharing during large televised events, such as the London Olympics, the Eurovision Song Contest or political elections.

This paper addresses how Twitter was used as a political backchannel and potential agenda setter during two televised political debates ahead of the Norwegian local election on September 12, 2011. We investigate to what degree the new arena enabled by social media, particularly Twitter, facilitates a different agenda from that of television, and how the Twitter users talk about the agenda and the debate. The article engages with current debates about the role of social media in audience participation and traditional media’s changing role as gatekeepers and agenda setters (Hermida, 2010). By applying a multiple step analysis of the Twitter dataset, we are able to analyse the flow of thousands of tweets and compare them with topics discussed in the televised debates. The analysis is unique in the sense that we analyse a smaller, national Twitter population in deeper detail than what is common in larger quantitative Twitter studies (e.g. Conover et al., 2011, Bruns and Burgess, 2011, Jensen and Anstead, 2013, Tumasjan et al., 2011).

The Norwegian case is interesting as the Norwegian population can be characterised as early technology adopters. Social media has taken a strong foothold in Norway, where broadband access and use of media technology is among the highest in the world. In 2011, 15% of the Internet population (which basically is the whole population, as the Internet penetration in 2012 was 95 %, according to Statistics Norway) used Twitter (Enjolras and Seggaard, 2011), while 56 % of the Norwegian Internet population used Facebook daily in 2012 (TNS Gallup, 2011). We can therefore expect the Norwegian setting to be relatively advanced in 2011 and the findings might be illustrative of wider phenomena.

Twitter and mediatized events

Since its launch in 2006, Twitter's potential to challenge the role of edited media as gatekeepers and agenda setters has increasingly caught the interest of researchers. Twitter has gained international attention as a breaking news medium (Kwak et al., 2010), as a utility during crisis (Mendoza et al., 2010), as well as a backchannel for televised events, such as Eurovision Song Contest or X-Factor (Highfield et al., 2013, Lochrie and Coulton, 2012), political tv-debates (Bruns, 2011) and talk shows (Andersson and Moe, 2012), to mention a few. Kwak et al. (2010) asked "What is Twitter, a Social Network or a News Media?" They argued, based on a quantitative study of the entire Twitter sphere in 2009, that Twitter is less a social network (low reciprocity) and more a news medium as 85% of tweeted topics have basis in news links.

A typical finding in several of the studies related to Twitter and political debates is that political Twitter use peaks during televised debates. When Bruns and Burgess (2011) studied Twitter activity on the hashtag #ausvotes during the 2010 Australian Federal Election, the three biggest Twitter peaks happened on days with significant live televised events.

Similarly, Larsson and Moe (2012) found a clear relationship between mediatized political events such as election debates and peaks in political Twitter use during the Swedish general election in 2010. This tendency was yet again confirmed in the Norwegian study of Twitter use during the election campaign in 2011 by Larsson and Moe (2012). Televised political debates drove up Twitter activity, in addition to increasing the use of political Twitter hashtags outside the hard core of political Twitter users. The increase in Twitter activity during TV debates can also be related to humour. Several studies (Bruns and Burgess, 2011; Harrington et al., 2012; Highfield, 2012; Holton and Lewis, 2011; Larsson and Moe, 2011) have identified humour as a typical part of Twitter exchanges related to political debates.

Furthermore, Mascaro and Goggins (2012) argued that Twitter operates as a "geographically independent virtual town square" during political TV debates in the US, and that "a significant number of the syntactical features specific to Twitter such as retweeting, @replies and hashtags are utilized to relay information, engage in discourse and create new threads of discourses related to issues that are brought up during the debate." "In that sense, social media tools can be vehicles for technologically mediated civic engagement" (Mascaro and Goggins, 2012).

According to Hallin and Mancini's models (2004), we could expect to find different media usage patterns in different geographic regions – often related to different media systems. However, the findings in the studies discussed above related to Twitter and political TV

debates are surprisingly similar, independent of differences in political culture, media cultures and technology environment. We could also expect to find other agendas in social media compared to mainstream media, such as studies of blogs and mainstream media have shown (Wallsten, 2007). In this context, we understand agenda setting as "the ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda" (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987). In their highly influential study, Max McCombs and Donald Shaw concluded in 1968 that the mass media exerted a significant influence on what voters considered to be the major issues of the presidential campaign. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position (McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

The longitudinal aspect of Twitter studies can set premises for some of the findings. As we have seen in the #ausvotes study (Bruns and Burgess, 2012), independent agendas from mainstream media are clearly found on the #ausvote hashtag during the tracked time period of more than one month. However, when the focus of study is only on selected TV debates during a very restricted time period, the Australian study shows that it is less likely to find an independent agenda (from mainstream media) on Twitter.

Based on these previous studies, we expect the Norwegian debate on Twitter to closely follow the topics discussed in the televised political debate. Even if the general debate on Twitter follows a different pattern than mainstream media, we expect Twitter debates during live events to be closely related to what is broadcasted. Therefore, our study predicts the following hypothesis:

H1: During televised political debates, the debates on Twitter follow the same agenda as the televised debate.

In this article we also want to look closer at how the debate on Twitter unfolds, in other words how the Twitter users are debating. Thus, the *content* of the tweets is the focus of this study, not the Twitter users' political background or preferences. In this regard, however, previous research gives fewer indications of what findings we may expect.

Elmer (2013) has demonstrated how "micro-blogging sites like Twitter have become key sites of 'rapid response' to live political events". Twitter can be used strategically by political parties, partisans and other viewers of the debate, as was observed in the Canadian 2008 election (Elmer, 2013). Therefore, we can also expect the Twitter users to challenge the agenda set by politicians and media in election debates. However, we might also see Twitter used as a "technology of fandom" (Highfield et al., 2012), where "established fan communities who would use social media to discuss the live coverage" and praise, ridicule or criticise the broadcast.

In order to explore not only what Twitter users are talking about during the debate, but also *how* and with *what sentiment*, we ask this research question:

RQ1: How are the Twitter users talking about the agenda and the televised debates?

The Norwegian context

The Norwegian election in 2011 took place in the aftermath of the tragic event on July 22, when 77 people got killed by Anders Behring Breivik at Utøya and in Oslo - a majority of

them children participating on the Labour party's youth camp at Utøya. 11 of the killed victims at Utøya were candidates during the 2011 local election. The tragedy happened in the early stage of the election campaign, and all the political parties agreed to postpone the election campaign as the country went through a collective mourning. The political parties agreed not to comment upon political topics or criticise each other until Aug 13. These rather gloomy circumstances are particularly reflected in the first debate, when terror and security was one of the main topics.

Televised debates between party leaders have become an important ritual in election campaigns in democratic countries. In Norway, such debates have taken place since 1961 (Allern, 2011). Previous research (Todal Jenssen and Aalberg, 2004; Krogstad, 2004) has shown that TV debates have considerable importance for agenda setting during Norwegian election campaigns. Furthermore, TV debates are produced and staged by broadcasters, and political parties are adapting to the journalists' premises and judgments rather than opposite, according to Thorbjørnsen (2009).

Even though the 2011 election was local, the election campaign was partly national, and the televised debates between party leaders were staged as national debates. All the seven parties represented in parliament were present in the televised debates. In the last debate, Rødt, a minor far-left party was also included.

Research design and methodology

In the 2011 election campaign, there were three televised debates between party leaders. The first took place on August 23, 2011 and was broadcasted on both *NRK1* and *TV2*, the largest TV stations in Norway. The two last ones were broadcasted on September 9, 2011 (*NRK1*) and September 10, 2011 (*TV2*). The two debates broadcasted on *NRK1* reached the largest audience and this study focuses on Twitter as a political backchannel during these two debates.

For this purpose a thematic code book was developed and used for manual coding of all tweets. There were two main categories of tweets; tweets about political issues and meta tweets. Tweets on political issues were coded based on what political issue they addressed (health, education, economics etc.). Meta tweets were typically tweets about individual politicians and the televised debate as such. Meta tweets were then coded for sentiment. Furthermore, we propose the IMSC model (Issue, Meta, Sentiment, Close Reading) as a guideline for mapping Twitter debates, partly inspired by Wohn and Na (2011)

To explain the coding in more details; the data was analysed in a four-step approach, drilling down from thousands of tweets to close readings. First, we conducted a comparative study of the issues discussed on television and on Twitter based on quantitative content analysis. 15 potential issues were identified based on analysis of party programs and web sites. Grounded in the actual televised debates, the initial coding was recoded into the major political issues in the televised debate (Terror, Health and Elderly, Size of municipalities, Education, Economy, and Transport). In addition to these issues, the initial coding showed that several tweets did not correspond to any political issue, but were other reflections about the debate or the participants. This was named 'Meta talk' in our study and defined as "the debate about the debate", which occurred frequently in our Twitter data.

The unique number of participants and share or retweets was also identified. In addition, the time of the tweets were coded into five-minutes time segments. This allowed us to perform a comparison between the flow of the televised debate and the corresponding debates on Twitter.

Secondly, as the study not only concerns what issues the users are talking about, but also how the debate unfolds, 'Meta talk' or "the debate about the debate" became particularly interesting. We noted that Meta talk was reoccurring frequently in the data material (about 50% of all tweets, both in August and September, see Table 2). An inductive approach generated three subcategories of Meta talk based on what was most frequently addressed by the Twitter users; (1) Politicians' answers, (2) Media setting and (3) Looks, grammar and body language. We defined 'Politicians answers' as tweets about Twitter users' comments on politicians' arguments during the debate such as tweets praising a politician for being really good in the debate. In the 'Media setting' category we coded tweets related to the agenda (or the main topics), the TV format, journalists' questions, etc. In the 'Looks, grammar and body language' category we coded tweets that commented on the politicians' appearance or body language, in addition to choice of words and grammatical errors. Humour is reoccurring in the Twitter data material in both the debates, but we decided not to code it as an independent category as it is often intertwined with other categories and irony often challenging to classify.

Thirdly, a sentiment analysis of tweets under the sub categories 'Politicians' answers' and 'Media setting' was carried out. As we wanted to explore whether Twitter users were supportive or disagreeing with the politicians or how the media setting was conducted, we further analysed the tweets in three categories: Supportive, Critical or Neutral. The Supportive category indicated tweets that were positive or praising of Politicians' answers or the Media setting, such as: "In my mind, @erna_solberg did a solid job tonight #høyre". Similarly, the Critical category included tweets that criticized or disapproved the Politicians' answers or Media setting, such as: "One question the reporter left out: What will you not prioritize in the next election period? #valg2011". The neutral category included tweets that were mostly nonaligned or uninvolved observations, such as "Heck, I don't need to watch it, I have voted early."

Finally, the fourth step was a close reading of selected tweets, illustrating phenomena identified during the previous steps. The relative manageable volume of 2391 tweets in this study made it possible to code the total material.

The two television debates were recorded and coded for time and topics (H1). Data from the Twitter stream was generated shortly after the events via Meltwater Buzz, a commercial online media monitoring service provided by Meltwater. Data was gathered as a meta search of several social media search engines. The advantage of this meta search was that we could include several search criteria in one search including both hashtags (#), @mentions and usernames. The number of tweets included in the study is the total number of tweets generated by our search during the time-span of the televised debates. The general reliability of Meltwater Buzz' meta search was tested by comparing Meltwater Buzz against the search engine Hashtracking.com. This was done by designing pilot searches for specific hashtags using the two searching tools in order to compare the results. This revealed that in situations where one tweet was retweeted many times, the Meltwater Buzz search would not provide all retweets. Consequently, we may have underestimated the number of retweets in our study slightly.

The search phrase included all Twitter names and real names of party chairs (e.g. "Jens Stoltenberg" OR "@jensstoltenberg"), hashtags for the televised shows (e.g. "#partilederdebatten") and common hashtags for election debates (e.g. "#valg2011" OR "#valg11"). Partly due to the unclear hashtag convention, as was also identified by Elmer (2012:23) in a Canadian study, one hashtag could not represent all relevant tweets during the televised debates.

The search results were exported to Excel spreadsheet and manually coded for time and topics (H1), how users talked about the topics related to the politicians answers and the media setting (RQ1). The sets of codes were exported to the SPSS statistical package for quantitative analysis. Based on the results of this analysis, selected Twitter postings were revisited for qualitative analysis.

Findings and analysis

During the first debate, which was held three weeks before the election, few of the Twitter participants published large quantities of tweets. The average number of tweets was 1,8 per Twitter user, while just 7 had more then 6 postings.

The second debate was only three days away from Election Day and was much more in campaign mood than the first and special debate in August. This was also visible on Twitter. Both the number of tweets and Twitter users had increased. The total number of tweets related to the second debate was three times as high as in the first debate. In the second debate, 8-10 postings were not unusual, and some Twitter users had more than 20 postings.

(Insert table 1 here)
(Insert figure 1 here)

Except for the number of tweets per participant, the two debates confirm the same pattern; Broad participation in the Twitter debate and no domination by a few contributors. Most tweets are original contributions, while one third are retweets (Table 1). Retweets can be compared to "liking" on Facebook, but a retweet is not necessarily an endorsement, nevertheless, the user indicates an interest in the tweet by sharing it further.

The two analysed debates are also similar because they are part of the same election campaign with the same party leaders discussing some of the same issues on main national PSB channels. Social media was not promoted at neither of the televised events, hence Twitter was not an official backchannel during the debates. Nevertheless, the debates are different as they mark the start and the end of the campaign, the format of the televised events were slightly different due to the prior national trauma, the length of the debates were different, the issues discussed slightly different, and the expectation of viewers were probably different - for the same reasons.

(Insert table 2 here)
(Insert figure 2 here)
(Insert figure 3 here)

Similarities across the two debates

Differences in the Twitter debates might be explained by the differences in the above-mentioned contextual variables. The similarities are, however, more striking and we observe five key tendencies that are similar in both debates:

1. The activity on our selected hashtags and Twitter user accounts increases over time during both the debates (Figure 1). This indicates that the level of engagement on Twitter increase during the televised debate.
2. The share of retweets is similar (Table 1). In both debates, about one-third of the tweets are retweets.
3. The topics discussed within predefined hashtags and user accounts follow closely the topics discussed in the TV debate (Figure 2 and Figure 3). The flows of the debates are very similar with only a small delay in the Twitter debates compared to the televised debate. There is no alternative political agenda on Twitter during the televised debate.
4. “Meta talk” - the debate about the debate - flows through both the Twitter debates (Figure 2 and Figure 3). About 50% of the activities on Twitter related to the televised debate are Meta talk in both events (Table 2). Meta talk is also one of the topics that create most engagement among the political Twitter users.
5. The share of Meta talk commenting Politicians’ answers and Media setting is similar in the two debates (Table 3). About half of the Meta talk concerns the politicians’ answers whereas about 20-25% of the Meta talk concerns the Media setting.

Meta talk in the debate

In order to facilitate a more in-depth discussion of the role of Meta talk in the Twitter debate, we will first look at how Meta talk relates to topics and participants in the debates. In the next section we scrutinize sentiments and attitudes.

(Insert table 3 here)

(Insert figure 4 here)

Meta talk, ‘the debate about the debate’ continues to rise gradually during the TV debate in September. Here is one example of Meta talk in a tweet (all the quoted tweets are translated from Norwegian to English by the authors):

“I’m curious when the debate about the debate ends and when the debate starts. #NRK #Election11. But all parties should be allowed to be statesmen”

Another Meta talk tweet picks up on a point mentioned by Kristin Halvorsen, party leader of the Socialist Left party regarding politicians and the use of social media:

“Kristin has a good point. Party leaders should answer on social media to people who have misunderstood their party. #election11 #election2011”

Meta talk is reaching a peak at the end of the debate when many Twitter users are evaluating which politician “won” the debate. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (Labour Party) and Knut Arild Hareide (party leader of the Christian Democratic Party) are judged most positively on Twitter in both the debates. But the most common type of Meta talk is humorous comments about the looks (i.e. appearances, clothes) or body language of the politicians, such as this comment:

”Tie winners: 1. Oddvar Stenstrøm, 2. Jens Stoltenberg, 3. Knut Arild Hareide #election2011 #partyleaderdebate”

As previously mentioned studies have shown, humour is often found when Twitter is used as a political backchannel. Ironic and sarcastic comments about arguments, hairstyles and body language are commonly shared, such as this tweet:

“In my view, tanning cream is used more and more in the election campaign. #election2011”

When education is the main topic during the TV debate in September, Meta talk slows down and drops to the lowest point during the Twitter discussion. At the same time, education tweets peak, indicating less distraction and more focus on the main topic.

Reactions to politicians’ answers and the media setting

Even though the comments on Twitter closely follow the agenda in the TV debates, Twitter users raise strong opinions, both supportive and critical, particularly toward politicians’ answers and the media setting. In order to examine the sentiment or attitude in the Meta talk tweets, we identified three main categories based on the data material; Politicians’ answers, Media setting, and Looks, grammar and body language. Some interesting findings are worth mentioning; a majority of the Meta talk tweets are discussions about the Politicians’s answers, such as:

“#partyleaderdebate @Trinesg delivered as usual – looking forward to #election2011 on Monday”

The same amount of Meta talk tweets are related to the Media setting and Looks, grammar and body language, except in September. In that debate, tweets about appearance and language increased because of particular outfits among the politicians and much-debated grammar use.

(Insert table 4 here)
(Insert figure 5 here)

When analysing the sentiment, we find that a majority of the comments about Politicians’ answers are supportive (related to the politician(s) they are mentioning), both in August and in September. Particularly in August, the positive attitude is strong as 57% of the tweets on politicians’ answers are positive (table 4). The supportive sentiment continues in September, however, less dominant. The positive sentiment can be an expression of the above-mentioned tendency of “fandom”, which we will return to in the discussion.

(Insert table 5 here)
(Insert figure 6 here)

A big difference in the media sentiment appears between August and September. While Meta talk related to the Media setting is fairly balanced in August, 59% of the tweets are critical of the Media setting in September (table 5). Many of the tweets challenge the agenda of the debate, the moderators' question, who gets to talk when and for how long and how well the moderators are performing, such as:

“Elderly, schools, roads – replay, replay, replay. Is that all #election2011 is about?”

“I think the NRK-debate tonight should be run by the local NRK stations – with local candidates, not the party leaders #valg2011”

Discussion

H1: During televised political debates, the debate on Twitter follows the same agenda as the televised debate.

Our analysis supports H1. The Twitter debate both in August and September followed closely the topics discussed on television. There is no alternative political agenda in the Twitter debate. The Twitter debates around specific hashtags and politicians' user accounts function as a political backchannel to the televised events, enabling users to continuously comment the broadcast as if unfolds live. This is underlined by the finding that even the flow of the debates are very similar with only a small delay in the Twitter debate compared to the televised debate. By participating in debates related to predefined hashtags, audience can turn television watching into communal, social events.

According to aforementioned studies (Bruns and Burgess, 2012, Elmer, 2012, Wallsten, 2007), we could expect the Norwegian Twitter debates on election-related hashtags to feature alternative agendas compared to mainstream media if the study covered a longer time periode. The very limited time frame of this study can explain why the Twitter debates mimic the TV agenda so closely. Our analysis also confirms that “compelling political TV events” (Shamma et. al, 2010) impact the debates on Twitter. The data material demonstrate that the debate about education in particular stimulated or provoked the most tweets, and simultaneously, reduced the number of Meta talk, or what Shamma et al. describe as “chatness” (2010).

The first debate in August was unique because of the tragic circumstances in Norway at the time, which can explain the low number of tweets, as well as the high degree of supportive tweets related to the politicians' answers. The tone in the televised debate was cautious and calm, which is also reflected in the tweets. In the second debate in September, however, the Twitter debate appears to be more in campaign mood, and we find more engagement and critical tweets, particular regarding the media setting, but also more tweets related to politicians' looks, grammar and body language. Increased Twitter activity at the end of election campaigns is a strong tendency in several studies about elections campaigns and Twitter (Bruns and Burgess, 2011; Jürgens and Jungherr, 2011; Larsson and Moe, 2011).

Even though broadcasting companies are defining the topics (and thus setting the agenda) during televised political debates, Twitter users are criticising, praising, fact checking and making fun of the political events taking place on the screen. We identified some clear tendencies when we investigated the data further, by asking this research question:

RQ1: How are the Twitter users talking about the agenda and politicians in the televised debates?

Meta talk – the debate about the debate – has an important function in driving attention and interest around the debate. One can argue that off-topic discussions about a party leader’s hair style or body language are of zero relevance, still, it gives value to Twitter users following the TV debate, as this tweet indicate:

“I love the combination of Twitter and #election2011”

Political fandom and media criticism on Twitter

Tweets related to the politicians’ answers, the media setting and looks, grammar and body language dominated the meta talk, and particularly tweets about politicians’ answers appear to be expressions of “fandom” (Highfield et al., 2013) - more specifically “political fandom”. Even though this study did not examine the Twitter users’ political background or which politician received most or least support and criticism, recent studies (Elmer, 2012, Chadwick, 2011) have demonstrated how political campaigns mobilize and encourage supporters to participate on Twitter during political TV events. In our material, Twitter users judge the performance of party leaders at the end of the show. Wohn and Na (2011) also found that after a political TV event, people engage in more opinionated discussions on Twitter. Somewhat surprisingly, a majority praise or support the politicians’ answers in both the debates. “Political fandom” on Twitter during live political TV events will depend on how successfully the political parties are in mobilizing their supporters to participate in the Twitter debate.

A stronger criticism is found in the Twitter users’ sentiment or attitudes towards the media setting. The co-production between the public broadcaster and the commercial broadcaster TV2 was received very positively by the Twitter users in the first debate. But particularly in the last debate, just few days before the election, many Twitter users addressed critical concerns about the choice of topics and the journalists’ questions. Broadcasters might still be gatekeepers during rituals such as political TV debates, however, Twitter audiences are expanding the conversation, giving live feedback on mediatized events.

Conclusion

In this article, we have presented a number of insights concerning how Twitter is used during televised debates in an election campaign. Through a multiple step analysis using the IMSC-model (Issue, Meta, Sentiment, Close Reading), we were able to identify not only how the Twitter debate aligns very closely with the flow of the TV debate, but also how the Twitter debates supplement and contrast the debate on television. The multiple step analysis started by comparing discussed *Issues* in the TV debates versus Twitter. Secondly, tweets discussing the “the debate about the debate”, *Meta talk*, were identified. Thirdly, the *Sentiments* of Meta talk tweets were analysed (mainly related to Politicians’ answers and Media Setting), and lastly, a *Close Reading* of selected tweets were performed. Our method is well suited to perform in-depth analysis of Twitter debates, and we look forward to its further enhancement

Our analyses of how Twitter users are talking about two televised political events demonstrate that Twitter not only provides a backchannel for reflections on the topics discussed, but also a channel for proclaiming political support and critical comments about the debates. Political fandom and media criticism were the two clear patterns we found when we investigated the data more closely. Thus, Twitter can represent an additional, if not necessarily alternative public space.

The “correction” to mainstream agenda setting often found in social media studies takes a different form in our study. Through our analysis of Meta talk or “the debate about the debate”, we have seen that Twitter users scrutinize the agenda set by mainstream media and the politicians, and the discussion about the debate is equally present as discussions about the political topics of the debate. This is a finding we have not seen documented in the literature before, but which became manifest in our multiple step approach. We look forward to future research that can explore in greater details some our findings here, such as political fandom and media criticism identified in the tweets. One approach could be to examine the sentiment of political debates on Twitter in a longitudinal aspect. Future research could also examine the aspect of political fandom on Twitter - who are the supporters and critics - “ordinary” citizens or party strategists? By moving beyond big data approaches often found in many Twitter studies, and rather dive into the details of political communication on Twitter during televised debates, new insights into Twitter as a political backchannel can emerge.

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Figure 1. Twitter debate, August & September

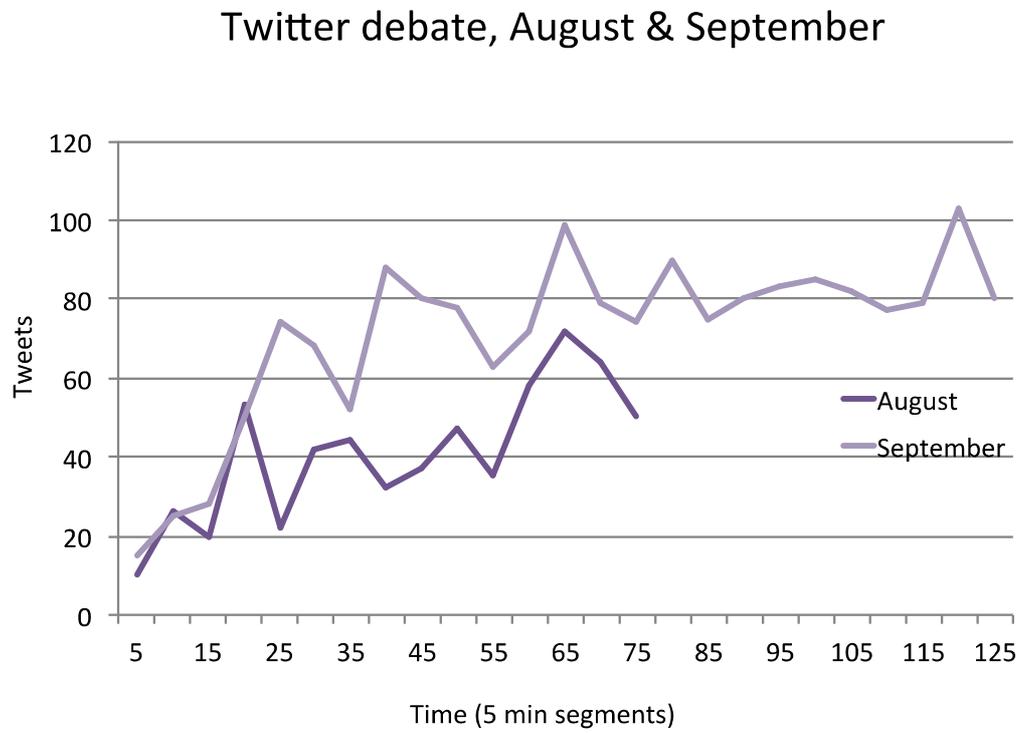


Figure 2. Debate on Twitter and TV, August

Most active debates on Twitter – and themes on TV, August

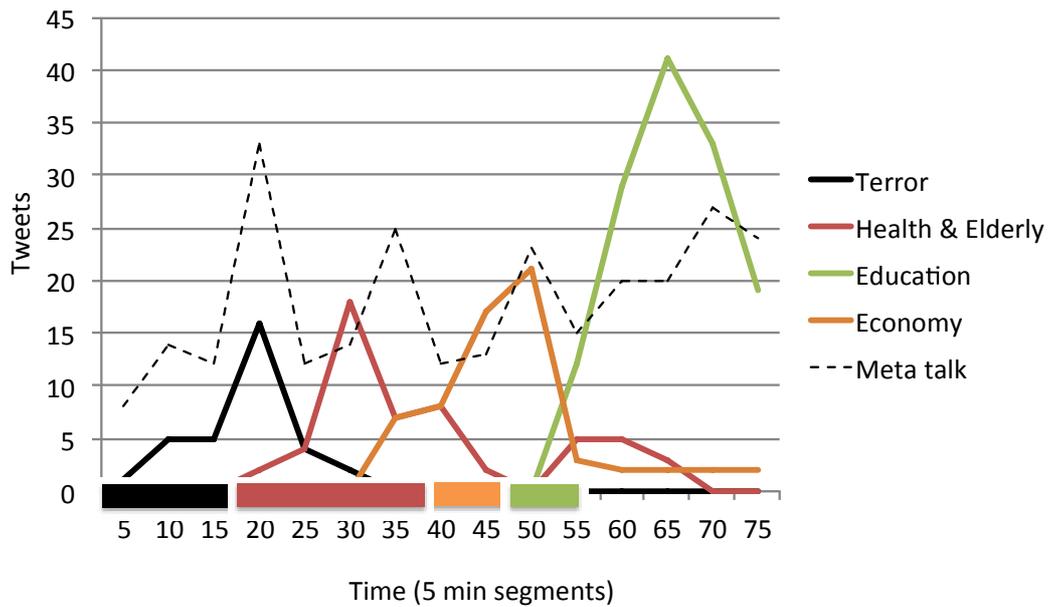


Figure 3. Debate on Twitter and TV, September

Most active debates on Twitter – and themes on TV, September

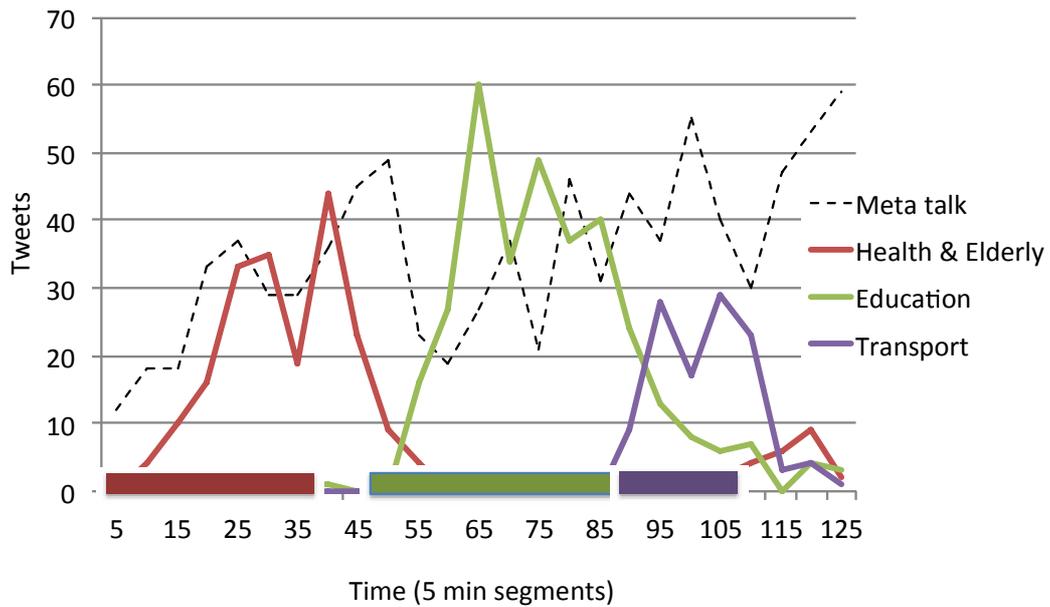


Figure 4. Meta Talk on Twitter, September

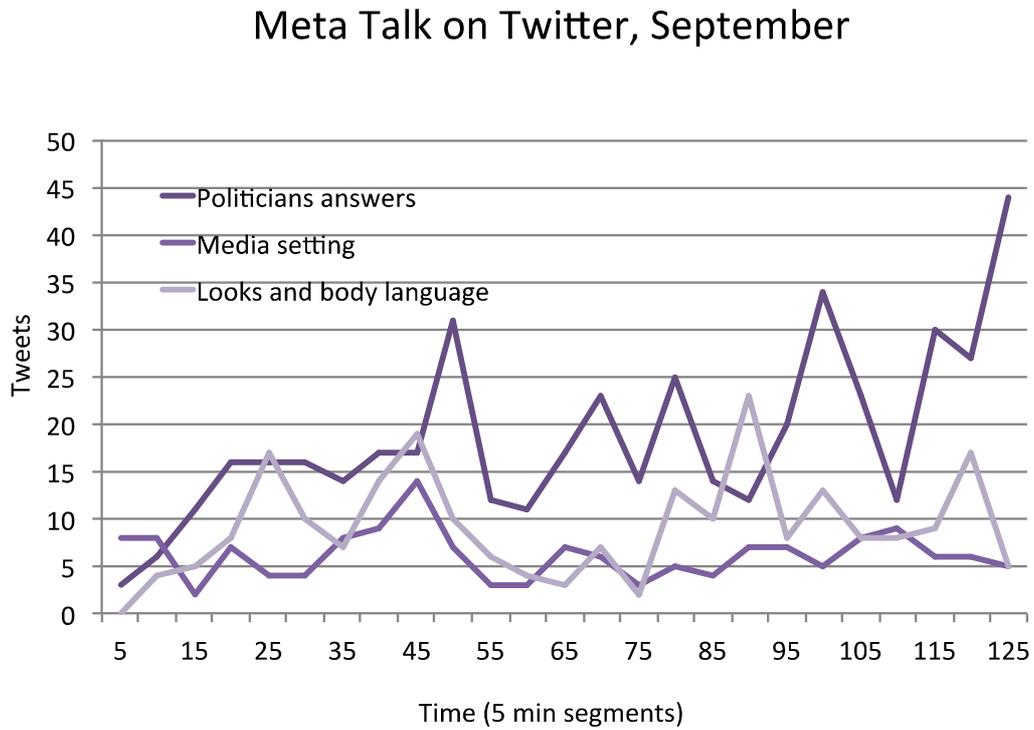


Figure 5. Sentiment Politicians' Answers, Twitter, September

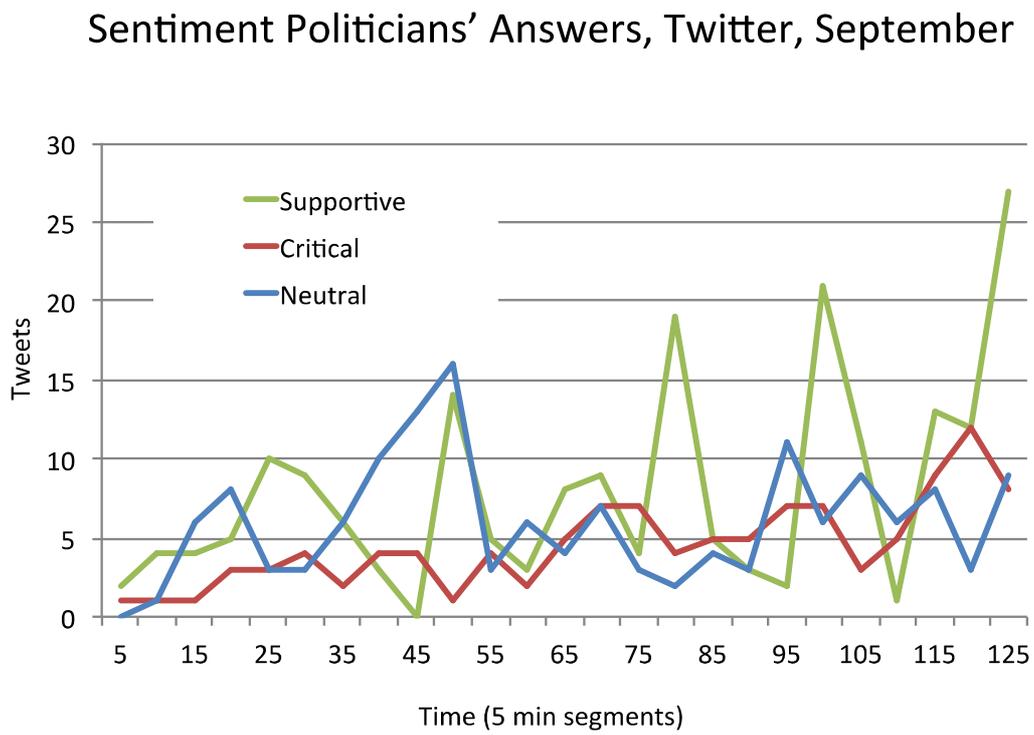
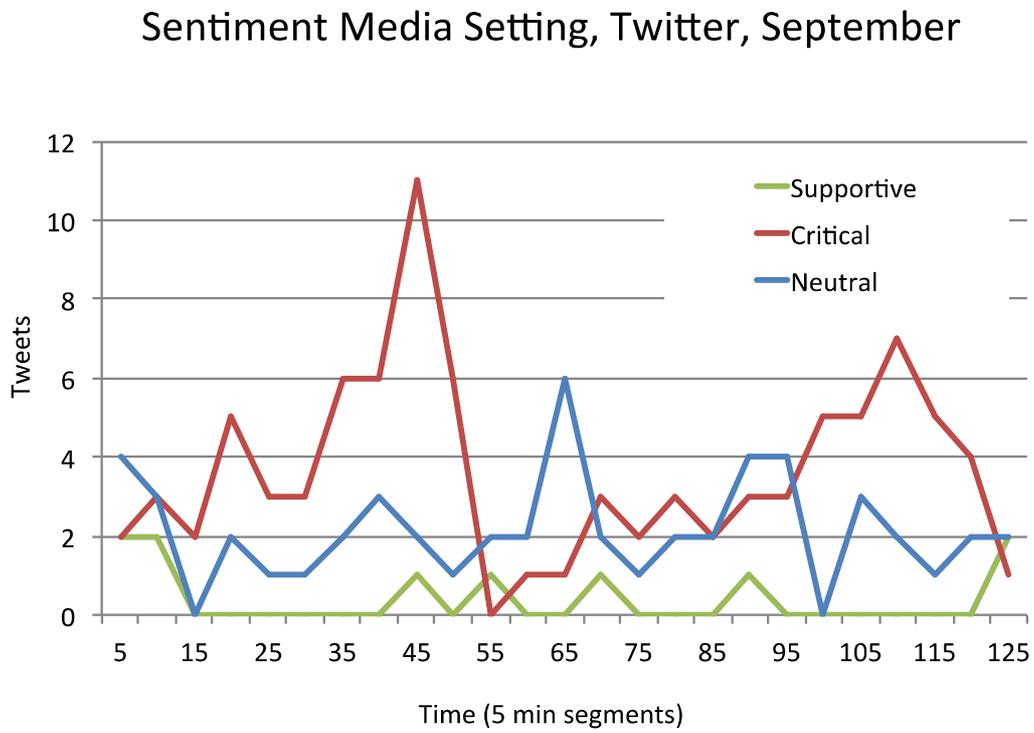


Figure 6. Sentiment Media Setting, Twitter, September



Tables

Table 1. Tweets and Twitter users related to the televised debates

Debate	23 August 2011	9 September 2011
Tweets total	612	1779
Unique Twitter users	343	638
Tweets on average	1.8	2.8
Retweets	31%	32%

Table 2. Major themes in Twitter debates.

Themes	August		September	
	N	%	N	%
Meta talk	311	50.2	887	49.9
Education	134	21.6	332	18.7
Economy & Tax	64	10.3	27	1.5
Elderly & Health	54	8.7	227	12.8
Transportation	-	-	115	6.5
Immigration	17	2,7	31	1.7
Other	10	1.6	66	3.7
N/A	29	4.7	94	5.3
Sum	619	100.0	1779	100.0

Note. The categories are developed in close conjunction to the categories for important topics used by Norwegian political parties on their websites.

Table 3. Meta talk.

	August		September	
	N	%	N	%
Politicians' answers	85	52.8	466	51.9
Media setting	28	17.4	155	17.3
Looks, grammar and body language	30	18.6	230	25.7
URLs			17	1.9
Not relevant	18	11.2	29	3.2
Total	161	100	896	100

Table 4. Sentiment Politicians' Answers

	August		September	
	N	%	N	%
Supportive	49	57.0	200	43.1
Critical	12	14.0	114	24.6
Neutral	25	29.1	150	32.3
Total	86	100	464	100

Table 5. Sentiment Media Setting

	August		September	
	N	%	N	%
Supportive	5	18.5	10	6.4
Critical	5	18.5	92	59.0
Neutral	17	63	54	34.6
Total	27	100	156	100