Politics at Home: Second Screen Behaviours and Motivations During TV Debates

Katerina Gorkovenko
DJCAD
University of Dundee, UK
k.gorkovenko@dundee.ac.uk

Nick Taylor
DJCAD
University of Dundee, UK
n.x.taylor@dundee.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The use of peripheral devices or *second screens* to access social media and other content is now a common activity during televised political debates. Based on a study conducted during the 2015 UK General Election debates, this paper explores attitudes and practices around such usage. Through the use of home observations and semi-structured interviews of 18 participants, we focus on the motivations that the participants had for using second screens, capturing both fulfilled and unfulfilled needs. Based on the results, we suggest future directions for research that may further support online political discourse and we identify the potential need to rethink the implied hierarchy of the phrase *second screens*.

Author Keywords

Second screens; television; politics; political discourse; social media; Twitter.

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation: Miscellaneous;

INTRODUCTION

Internet-connected devices and services have revolutionised the way we interact with traditional media. While watching television, 86% of Americans aged 13 to 64 use their mobile phone to multi-task [21]. These peripheral devices—known as *second screens*—are commonly used to socialise, search for information and complete personal tasks, such as checking emails [20]. This practice has sparked the imagination of both content producers and advertisers. For content producers it offers a way to further engage viewers: we are now frequently asked to contribute to online discussion, especially around current affairs and reality TV, and specialist second screen applications can support viewers watching dramas with complex storylines and casts of characters [19]. Where new technologies like video streaming have previously encouraged asynchronous media consumption, second screens encourage live viewing by providing timely content and a social experience. For broadcasters, this serves to increase advertising revenue [21] and even offers new ways to advertise.

However, this trend also has the potential to transform aspects of political engagement, and second screens are commonly used alongside political programming [1]. For example, *Question Time*—a long-running, weekly debate programme in the UK—is accompanied by a high volume of tweets using the programme's official hashtag. In addition to regular programming, special election debates form an important part of the election cycle in many countries, and much of the existing research around second screens and politics has focused on the use of Twitter during these debates [1, 2, 6, 16, 26]. This takes place against increasing recognition that technology has much to contribute to the political sphere, with many governments now embracing digital technologies or even redesigning the legislative process with the aid of crowdsourcing and online deliberation tools [17]. In the UK, a recent government report has promised major commitments to use technologies to be "more transparent, inclusive, and better able to engage the public with democracy" [25].

Our research is motivated by the belief that second screens present new ways to engage citizens in public discourse. Existing research in the area has focused on how Twitter is utilised alongside debates, including analysis of its main users [2], how it is used by politicians [2, 15, 16], the language characteristics of the tweets themselves [1, 6, 26] and the hindrances of using it for political deliberation [3, 23]. However, less apparent is the initial motivation of viewers for making use of second screens alongside debates. By understanding these motivations, we can potentially design new applications and services that better meet the viewers' needs. In doing this, it may be possible to support increased political engagement and higher quality public discourse around televised debates.

This paper presents a study conducted during the UK General Election Debates in 2015, designed to identify how second screens were utilised and what motivated viewers to do so. In doing this, we are able to identify not just how second screens are supporting engagement with debates, but also how they are *not*. Where past studies have typically

Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. Copyrights for components of this work owned by others than the author(s) must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, or republish, to post on servers or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee. Request permissions from Permissions@acm.org.
NordiCHI '16, October 23 - 27, 2016, Gothenburg, Sweden
Copyright is held by the owner/author(s). Publication rights licensed to ACM.
ACM 978-1-4503-4763-1/16/10...$15.00
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2971485.2971514

focused on the content generated through second screens, we identify needs that are not currently being met and contribute a more nuanced understanding of the motivations behind this content. In doing so, we identify potential future design directions for second screen applications in order to better support public engagement around political debates.

BACKGROUND

Second Screens

Second screens are personal devices, such as smartphones, tablets and laptops, used to accompany a television broadcast [10], typically while accessing or creating content directly related to the programme being watched [10, 22]. In this context, the 'first' screen is the television, which delivers the main content and drives the contextual use of the device [10]. The array of applications that exist on the market include co-viewing, check-in and TV guide applications [21], all designed to add social, informational and advertisement value to the TV experience, while promoting live viewing [21]. However, much of the content related to second screen usage is still accessed using pre-existing applications, such as web browsers and social media applications.

In a case study exploring live tweeting during *Downton Abbey,* researchers identified several benefits that came with using social media to accompany a live broadcast, such helping people not feel alone, be a part of a community and affirm their opinion [22]. In a survey about the TV drama *Justified*, participants said that they use their devices to look up related information, unrelated communication and social media [19]. For event specific applications—like those designed for sporting events like the Olympics—research has addressed challenges including how to limit the need for visual attention and how to synchronise and curate content [3, 21].

Although we expect to see similarities between the motivations and behaviours in second screen use during non-political and political programs, previous research indicates unique effects relating to political content. In a study exploring the effect of combining political television with social media content, it was discovered that viewers have the tendency to conform to the opinions they see expressed through social content, although the effect was less pronounced when the footage was about polarising political issues like gun regulation [7]. Another example is a study into the use of Twitter around a politically charged program called Benefits Street, which looks into the lives of British benefits recipients [5]. The study discovered that during air time the content generated on Twitter tended to be abusive and judgemental, whereas between the programs viewers of the program posted much more appreciating, defending and contesting content [5].

Social Media and Political Television

Social media is now a fixture in politics, including during televised debates. A study into the Australian federal election of 2007 discovered that the day of a debate marks a significant increase in election tweets [6]. This use of technology by citizens has created an opportunity to gauge public opinion. In a study surrounding the US presidential debates of 2008, it was discovered that the Twitter discourse gave insights into the viewers' evaluations of the topics and main participants of the debate [24]. Through an analysis of tweets it was discovered that the content generated by the majority of users is an emotional response to what happens on screen [26, 29] and that it tends to give some sort of an evaluation of the participants [24]. But although researchers see this visible behaviour on Twitter most people online act as observers learning how others feel about the event they are all witnessing together [22]. This creates the feeling of a shared experience. However, influence is not evenly distributed throughout: it rests primarily with politicians, journalists and a small group of anonymous users [15].

This growth in use of social media for political discourse is not restricted to election periods, and second screen adoption is common during other political broadcasts [1, 6, 24]. *Question Time* has utilised an official hashtag since 2009, and even before the advent of social media, viewers could send messages via SMS message, some of which were shown on the BBC's teletext service. Within the first month of the hashtag being launched, a particularly controversial edition featuring a far right party leader saw the hashtag used at a rate of 800 tweets per minute [1]. It has also been shown that a large proportion of *Question Time* tweets contain actionable language that could initiate action beyond the broadcast [12].

Political Discourse Online

Beyond second screens, online discourse continues to play a large role in modern politics. Studies suggest that politicians use Facebook and Twitter for a variety of purposes, the most important of which are to campaign, self-promote and spread information [14]. This is particularly important since Twitter is widely utilised by journalists from traditional media [2]. For the general public, Twitter can foster a sense of community that can be absent in one's physical social circles [22]. However, despite the promise of social media for political engagement, users experience numerous concerns when it comes to contributing online. These include privacy worries, that self-expression is difficult, it costs time and energy, it can be uncivil [3], that they may receive a negative reaction, that it doesn't suit their online identity, or they fear sounding ignorant [23].

This suggests that there remains much potential for creating better opportunities to engage with political discourse. At present, much of the work around political broadcasts has focused its attention on the publicly visible content created, particularly through Twitter. What this does not capture is the underlying motivation for participating, or for *not* participating. In order to fully understand how second screens might support engagement with debates, it is important to capture these less visible experiences. By doing so, our research aims to identify new design opportunities for second screen applications to support political discourse.

RESEARCH CONTEXT: UK GENERAL ELECTION 2015

Our study was conducted around the UK General Election held in May 2015 and a series of televised debates held the previous month. Although televised debates have been a staple of major elections in other countries, this was only the second time they had been used in a UK General Election. The debates themselves had been a source of much controversy after lengthy negotiations between government and the media over the format of the events, leading to a high degree of public interest and frequent speculation that they would not take place at all [28]. The increased prominence of several smaller parties—particularly the SNP (Scottish nationalists) and UKIP (advocating leaving the European Union)—led to further discussion about who should be allowed to participate. Eventually, and at short notice, four separate televised events were agreed upon: two with a typical debate format (one featuring seven major parties and one featuring only smaller parties) and two following a less adversarial Q&A format with individual party leaders.

As had been the case at the previous election, social media was also a major factor during the debates themselves: the #leadersdebate hashtag used by one debate received 1.5 million tweets [4]. As would be expected, the entire election period saw vast amounts of online discourse generated, with 78 million Facebook interactions across the campaign [8] and 3.8 million tweets using #GE2015 on election day [27].

METHOD

Our research aims to identify the behaviours and motivations that shape the use of peripheral devices during a televised political debate. To capture second screen activity surrounding the debates we recruited 18 participants and asked them to record themselves at home watching a debate of their choosing.

Recruitment

We aimed to recruit participants with varied political interests, social media usage and viewing arrangements. Thirteen participants were recruited through advertisements placed on social media, university mailing lists, newsletters and posters. They would watch a debate of their choosing at home, either alone (N=2) or with a friend or family member (N=11). A further five participants were jointly recruited with another study and carried out the same task in a group setting at the university. We elected for a relatively small cohort to allow us to capture rich user experiences not possible with a large group. Eligibility was determined by the use of typical second screen apps (e.g. social media), ownership of a smartphone, tablet or laptop and the desire to watch the debates.

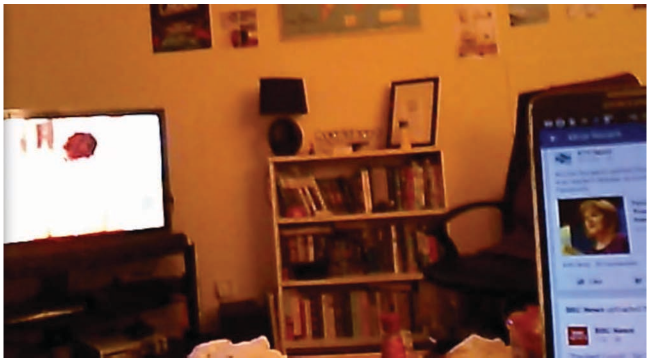


Figure 1. An example from the footage that was collected during the observation stage of the research.

Through a pre-questionnaire we established that all but one of the 18 participants were within the 18 to 29 age bracket, with eleven males and seven females. The homogenous age of the participants can be explained by the recruitment methods used and by the technological focus of the study. The participants had varying levels of political engagement: seven of them were very politically engaged (four of which were politics students), eight moderately engaged and three slightly. Participants were recruited in Scotland (N=15), England (N=2) and Wales (N=1). They had a wide range of political party preferences such as Labour (N=4), SNP (N=8), Green (N=3), Conservative (N=1) and undecided (N=2), which roughly corresponds to general trends in Scotland. They indicated that they all used their devices to access either Facebook (N=7), Twitter (N=6) or both (N=5), as well as varied other new sources, messenger services and websites. They mainly used their smartphones (N=10), but we also saw tablet (N=5) and laptop (N=3) use.

Watching the Debates

Each participant was provided with a small wearable camera (a Veho MUVI Micro) and asked to leave the device recording while watching a debate. This approach was utilised in order to capture behaviour in the home where participants would act most naturally, without being distracted by the presence of a researcher. For their privacy, participants were allowed to pick the position of the camera but were encouraged to either attach it to their lapel (to capture their view of the television and personal device) or place it directly in front of themselves (to capture their face). Only three participants opted for the latter placement. All participants were instructed on how to use the camera ahead of the debates and expressed confidence about the recording process. Example footage is shown in Figure 1.

This footage was not intended to be analysed directly, due to the difficulty of meaningfully capturing the nuances of people's interaction. Instead, it was condensed in order to be used as a memory prompt alongside interviews. Each recording was reviewed and condensed by the lead researcher into a 10-minute segment, including moments of high activity and all instances where participants interacted with their personal device. We also collected all tweets and retweets made by the participants on Twitter and asked that they take screenshots from their personal posts on Facebook. In total we recorded 15 Facebook posts, 49 tweets and 48 re-tweets.

Interviews and Analysis

Within a week of the debate the participants took part in a semi-structured interview about their experience and motivations, lasting between 30 to 80 minutes. In the first half, participants were asked why they used their peripheral devices, what for, what they liked and didn't like about it, and how it augmented the televised event. In the second part they watched the condensed video and were prompted to reflect on the footage. The interviews were then transcribed and underwent a thematic analysis, during which two researchers independently coded a set of interviews and agreed upon the codes used. Once all of the interviews were analysed the emerging themes were refined and agreed upon by the research team.

RESULTS

Our findings exposed a number of motivations for utilising second screens alongside the debate, but also concerns that participants had about contributing content. Below, we describe the three major themes that emerged from our thematic analysis: gauging opinion, enriching the debate and sharing opinion, further broken down into a number of sub-themes. It is notable that the second screen activity captured by our participants almost entirely represents social media usage and many of the behaviours mirror those that have been identified from examining social media content alone. However, by observing and interviewing participants directly, our findings expose a wide range motivations for utilising second screens and concerns about posting content online.

Gauge Opinion

All 18 participants in the study described the ability to gauge public opinion through the use of social media apps as the most valuable aspect of using a second screen device. As the interview responses suggest, Twitter and Facebook are used in a process of learning what others think, reflecting upon that and in most cases reaffirming their own opinion rather than changing it.

Learn

The participants learned what others thought about the debate via social media apps, although a few also accessed online broadcasters who provided a live stream of commentary such as the Guardian and BBC News. When reading information and opinions online the participants recognised variety and relevance as the most important aspects of online content. Content was perceived as relevant if it reflected the content from the debate instantaneously.

Variety of opinion was vital for the process of learning. For example, the participants wanted to see people with opposing views to their own (P1: *"You can obviously see people endorsing something that you totally don't think, so it's interesting to see that opinion"*), people from different locations around the UK (P13: *"It was quite interesting to see especially being* [an SNP supporter]*, what people from England and Wales and Northern Ireland thought of them"*), and their friends (P14: *"It's interesting to see people who are not usually interested in it and who don't talk about it. Like people who I was in school with"*).

Although everyone valued variety, it is interesting to note that there was a difference in the sourcing of this diverse opinion between participants who perceived themselves as very politically engaged and those who didn't. The four politics students expressed a preference for their personal Twitter stream where they follow a curated group of political commentators, journalists, satirical profiles and academics (P17: *"I have built up the people that I follow and who follow me, sort of got a rapport and sort of share the same sort of attitude rather than views",* P4: *"I usually keep to my feed because it's always got good stuff"*). The main reason that they identified for not being interested in the opinions of the general public and their friends who they could find on Facebook was that they questioned the quality of their views (P5: *"I don't care what any of my friends think really. I mean I care less about what they think than other people who are more interested"*). In contrast the rest of the participants who perceived themselves as less politically involved showed more interest in what friends and family think about politics and identified Facebook as a primary source of such opinion (P9: "*Facebook is more about interacting with people I know*"). This behaviour can be attributed to the fact that the politics students had an already established political community commenting along the broadcast, whereas less politically engaged participants lacked a politically-focused network and instead turned to friends and family.

The most prominent type of content that the participants were interested in was what others thought were the highlights of the debate, which had the effect of guiding their attention to aspects of the event that they might have not noticed (P1: *"It is definitely beneficial because you get highlighted things that maybe you did not think of before"*). Often these highlights would include humorous remarks about the politician's behaviour, clothing, mannerisms and speech. The participants were also interested in the tools and experiences of others on the internet. On one occasion two of the participants noticed that Twitter users were commenting about the live opinion tracker (or 'worm') shown alongside the broadcast (P6: *"We switched to the worm actually because we saw tweets about it"*). The 'Top Tweets' section (a slightly filtered stream of more popular Tweets) was a primary way to see what drew the public's attention (P6: *"I was on #GE2015 and #BBCdebate. I just search them occasionally and see what rises to the surface"*). The very politically engaged participants also emphasised the value of evaluations of what is said and how the politicians were performing (P17: *"In an event like that you are interested in when someone says something* *and someone points out that it is false. Correcting them and fact checking"*).

The relevance of content depended on the speed at which it was posted. Immediacy was the key factor that made gauging public opinion possible, with participants describing it as "*instant feedback*" (P7). Those that used both Facebook and Twitter regularly expressed a preference to Twitter solely for it's instantaneity (P17: "*With Twitter you have got things coming through and it's easier to actually see what is happening. Whereas Facebook feels slower"*).

Reflect

Knowing how others perceived the politicians and their arguments was then used to reflect upon the participant's political position and the performance of the politicians. However, all of the participants felt the online content they saw either reaffirmed or did not change their view of the politicians (P18: "*From reading the comments I saw that most people agreed with me*"). One participant explained that re-tweeting served as a way of bookmarking interesting tweets in order to return to them at a later time (P4: *"I would just re-tweet it so I can go back to it* […] *so it's like a diary almost"*). Although during the programme everyone found that others have a similar opinion to them, in one case the person reconsidered their initial impressions based on online content he read in the days that followed (P7: *"I thought* [the Green Party leader] *did quite well during the debate but then after getting people's views after it* […] *you are putting things together and you are like 'Ahh!'"*). It is apparent through the interviews that the participants acknowledged the importance that the second screen had in the process of reflecting upon the debate. An understanding of the opinion of others is valued and viewed as vital for the understanding of the impact their vote may have (P8: *"I would rather just feed on everyone's opinion and get an understanding of what other people are thinking other than myself because I want to make the best decision"*). The lack of structure and enormous amounts of content that they were exposed to online was at times hindering reflect rather than enabling it.

Reaffirm

It is interesting to note that despite the minor changes of view described above, none of the participants reported their political opinion changing dramatically based on what they saw online or on TV. No matter how politically engaged a participant was the content that they read during the debate had the effect of reaffirming their opinion. This was based on three major factors. First, all of the participants had a pre-conceived idea of whom they would like to vote for (P3: *"I was not expecting to go into the debate and change my mind based on social media or the debate itself. But I think it could do for someone else"*). The second reason is that many of the participants experienced an echo chamber effect, where they are mainly exposed to views similar to their own (P7: *"People wall themselves into echo chambers, they surround themselves with the opinions that they want to see or hear"*). The third reason is that the most participants were dismissive of opposing opinions (P4: "*When you see something you don't like* […] *I just go 'you are an idiot' to myself"*).

Enrich Debate

In our second theme, we can see that the personal devices that participants used throughout the debate also had the effect of enriching the experience. Many expressed a need for this use due to their perception of the debate as "*boring*" (P4) and "*shallow*" (P5), but also as a "*spectacle*" (P7) by those with a more positive outlook on the debates. The shallowness of the event meant that there was room to add value though the use of their devices for entertainment, empowerment and as a talking point with the people in their surroundings.

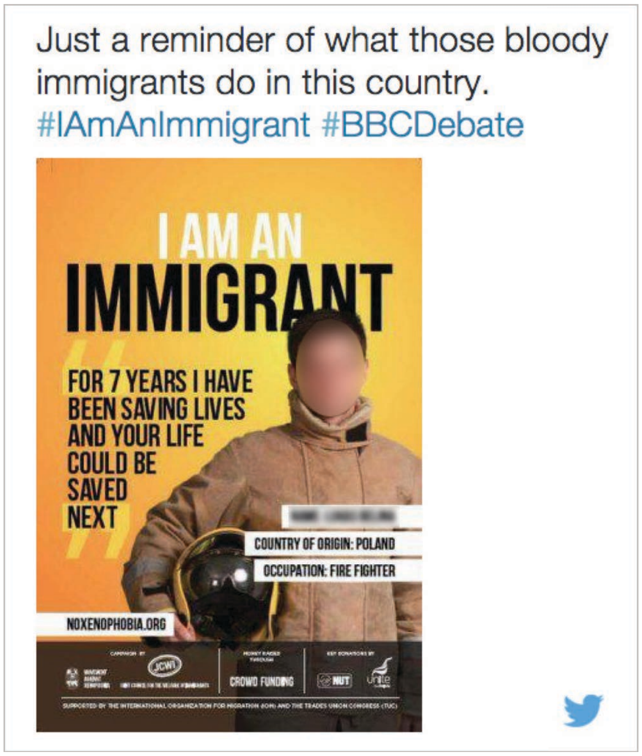
Entertainment

Humour had a positive effect on participants who felt disengaged with the broadcast. The participants expressed the opinion that the juxtaposition of the seriousness of the political debate with humorous content made politics accessible for more people (P5: *"Politics is quite dry and boring for most people and anything that lightens it up is a good thing"*). Humour also served an important role in creating a social online atmosphere. Facebook and Twitter were identified as a way to feel as if you are in the company of others. This content was especially valued by individuals who watched the debate alone (P17: "*I think a lot of it is just a public way of chatting at the TV screen. It makes it actually feel much more of a collective event"*). Furthermore, some participants used their devices for personal communication and unrelated content in an effort to distract themselves from the debate (P3: *"A lot of the time I am willingly getting distracted because I don't want to listen to them all that much"*, P4: "[Using WhatsApp] *was not really about the debate it was just general chit chat"*). It may seem counterproductive that one of the most valued aspects of second screens in the context of a political debate is distraction from the debate itself, but since many of the participants that did not feel very politically engaged it was a way to sustain a level of interest in the event.

Empowerment

Second screens provided a valuable tool that empowered the participants, bridging the public with the politicians themselves. For some, it was a source of information about candidates with the aid of search tools like Google (P11: "*I looked up who was the Green* [Party] *candidate for* [my area]. *Because I had not looked at that before"*), while for others a way to gauge their opinions (P4: *"There is a few times where is I am like 'Oh I really want to know what* [a candidate has] *to say'. If they are not in my feed immediately then I will look"*). The most valuable aspect of being able to connect to politicians was that it gave them a sense of authenticity. It was not enough for political leaders to have a social media presence: they need to be actively engaging with the public, which gave viewers a sense of their personality *(P17: "It is engaging with them as an individual rather than 'thank you for your comment' you are actually engaging in conversation with people. It's a good way for them to be able to show their human side"*) and accountability (P6: "*I feel that it is a platform to represent yourself and if you are not on there then there shouldn't be a front for your name"*). This had the effect of generating trust and reinforcing the participants' desire to vote for those individuals (P7: *"*[The SNP leader] *would talk to the other politicians, she would tweet journalists* […] *the idea that she may tweet you back* […] *fosters the creation of a sense of trust"*).

In this theme, we also see instances where the television screen took on a secondary role. Rather than dictating the online behaviour of the participants, it was a catalyst for political activism. For example, one participant was the face of a campaign meant to foster empathy towards immigrants who used the increased social media attention around the debate to increase the campaign's exposure, much in the way advertisers might (Figure 2). A tweet posted through his personal device received many comments, 142 retweets and 88 favourites (a far greater number than anyone else from the participant group). Other participants used less involved tools like change.org to actively engage with a cause (P11: *"I follow quite a lot of change.org petitions* […] *It has had an effect in the past"*).


Just a reminder of what those bloody immigrants do in this country. #IAmAnImmigrant #BBCDebate

I AM AN
IMMIGRANT
FOR 7 YEARS I HAVE BEEN SAVING LIVES AND YOUR LIFE COULD BE SAVED NEXT
[redacted]
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: POLAND
OCCUPATION: FIRE FIGHTER
NOXENOPHOBIA.ORG
CROWD FUNDING
NUT

Figure 2. An example of one of the participants using Twitter as a platform for political activism.

Use as Talking Point

This theme was evident in all eleven individuals that watched the debates at home with their friends and family. When interesting pieces of information emerged from their second screen usage, they shared it with the people around them for the purpose of entertainment, education and to socialise. Google and Twitter were the main online tools that sparked discussion.

In one instance, we saw online content being used as an educational talking point amongst a family. P4 watched the debate with her father and used Twitter at the same time. When she stumbled upon a tweet by a celebrity regarding the debate she shared it and used it as the basis of a discussion about the political views of people that may be of interest to her father. This example was especially interesting as it involved someone who did not use technology was included into the online discourse by proxy. P4 explained that she felt that she acts as a bridge between the digital world and her father (P4: *"Sometimes he would be reading about the debate in newspapers and I would say that I have read on Twitter about Russell Brand that he would have not had access to. I think it's just to… to educate him a little bit"*).

All eleven participants who watched the debate with a friend or family member discussed the online content they came across with the person because face-to-face discourse had greater value to them (P5: "*Having a conversation with a real person is inherently better*"). The conversations that were created broadened the experience of the participants: some benefited from the contacts and work that was done by the other person (P8: "*I was watching the debate I was feeding off of what* [P7] *was looking up and sort of mainly to gain information about the parties*"), while for others it was another way to make the debate more entertaining (P15: "*The funny* [posts] *are the ones you would always show each other*"). The conversations that they had with each other reinforced learning, reflecting and entertainment. The fact that everyone took part in conversing about the online content that they found points to the great value that technology may have within the living room family dynamic.

Share Opinion

The final theme was apparent throughout the interviews, although the ways participants shared their opinion varied. While seven of the 18 participants did not contribute content online themselves, they still felt that the action would be beneficial for others but expressed personal fears, a preference for person to person interaction or lack of motivation (P14: *"I prefer reading. I talk about politics in person but I am too scared of people on the internet").*

Influencing Factors

The decision to share or not share opinions online was influenced by a number of factors. These included the particular properties of the platform being used in terms of audience, behavioural norms and effort. Participants often had to make a decision about whom the recipient of the opinion would be (P13: "*A lot of my friends that I have on*

Facebook I don't have on Twitter […] *so it was just a case of trying to share my view as much as possible"*). Furthermore, they were aware of unwritten etiquette and behavioural norms on social media, especially on Facebook. These included frequency of posts and responses, homogeneity of attitudes and the probability of a reaction by an unwanted audience member. This led to some participants feeling reluctant to post their thoughts (P17: "*I comment a lot more on Twitter than I do on Facebook. So it would just end up flooding my Facebook timeline with silly comments"*, P7: *"People's Facebook timeline they are precious about. If you dare talk about politics on their Facebook they are like 'It's not like you have a politics degree man!'"*).

The two social networks also required different amounts of effort to post: for example, Twitter's 140-character limit was perceived as an obstacle to self-expression by a few of the participants (P3: *"Sometimes when I have Tweeted in the past I have had to rewrite it like 4 times. It's all abbreviated and looks a mess. It looks like you can't spell"*). Six of the participants felt it was best to use a platform they felt comfortable with in order to post (P3: *"I feel I can express myself more openly* [on Facebook]. *I would only get abuse from friends and that is not a problem"*), while five curated their online activity and used the strengths of multiple social networks to create a new type of experience (P15: *"I just read what other people try to say on Twitter and try to gauge people's opinion. Whereas Facebook is more about interacting with people I know and commenting myself"*). Small interactions such as liking or re-tweeting, usually as an indication of agreement, caused much less anxiety (P1: *"It's a good opportunity to try and re-tweet something that someone has thought but has maybe articulated it better"*).

Although the perceived audience, effort and etiquette influenced the way the participants expressed themselves, the biggest factor that deterred self-expression was the fear of provoking someone. A large proportion of the participants avoided making statements that could lead to disputes or hurt people's feelings (P8: "*I don't even look at an argument, a discussion or a debate I am not one to get into it* […] *because I don't want to sound like an arsehole",* P1: *"If you say something negative it can go badly*"). Others found that debating helped them solidify their own arguments (P15: "*It's good to hunt out an argument sometimes because you learn from arguing with people"*).

Reasons for Sharing

Only the participants with strong political engagement were able to explicitly articulate the value of posting content, other than as a way to react to the debate and interact with others. Posting thoughts about the debate had a few beneficial outcomes for the participants, such as providing an ego boost (P17: *"In a way I am a bit shameless and looking for a bit of attention. Trying to get a joke that people will like"*), allowing them to light-heartedly commentate (P7: *"My Twitter is effectively where I vomit up the contents of my mind"*), and as an opportunity to help their future career (P1: *"I probably started tweeting about this sort of thing to do it for my career or to have more of an online presence"*).

These motivations were clearly reflected in the content posted by participants. To get the attention P17 wanted, he humorously mocked the conservative party leader's way of avoiding to answer questions directly and his persistent use of 'sound-bites'. P1, who saw Twitter as a way to further her career, disputed the claims made by politicians by carefully paraphrasing the points she disagreed with and expressing her own opinion on them. P7, who used Twitter to unload his thoughts, tweeted his opinion on the clothes of the politicians, their behaviour and his own excitement about the debate.

Desirable Qualities

When sharing their opinion online, participants mentioned that humour, immediacy and integrity are essential. One participant justified his need to make a tweet funny in order to not seem antagonistic, while others simply enjoyed being funny (P17: *"I come up with humorous comments. To mock him and make a bit of a joke out of it. Those are the sort of things that people pick up and re-tweet around"*). Content posted by the participants included 15 tweets and two Facebook posts with humorous content. The majority of those posts use sarcasm, satire and irony to mock aspects of the debate. For example, P13 commented on the behaviour of the Labour leader on Facebook: *"#leadersdebate Milliband loves talking to us people at home, that makes me trust him more…"*.

The instantaneous nature of the debate meant that content needed to be generated quickly and be posted while it was still relevant (P15: "*It's generally immediately afterwards because generally by the end of the debate you are angry about something else"*). Statements needed to have sufficient backing otherwise they compromised the integrity of the online discussion (P6: "*I would not post it if I don't look it up. If I can't be bothered looking up I will not post it"*). However, while the participants spoke about the importance of humour, relevance and integrity, the vast majority their own posts focused on aspects of the debate or the participants that they disliked. This resulted it overwhelmingly negative commentary that was sometimes conveyed humorously.

The most dramatic difference between the use of the two platforms was that Twitter was used to broadcast opinion and Facebook was used for discussions. P7, who used Twitter to commentate also used Facebook but in a much more interactive way. His post read *"So who do you think won?"* and underneath he took part in a discussion with his friends. This tendency to want to discuss on Facebook because of the friend circle that exists there, was evident in those other participants that used the platform (P15:

"Contribute on Facebook. Read on Twitter. Strangers vs friends").

DISCUSSION

Through this study we have explored the experiences of second screen users during the 2015 UK General Election debates. These findings expose the value that viewers see in second screens, but also the concerns they have that prevent them from participating further, making it clear that existing desires are not being fully met by current second screen applications—which ultimately consisted almost entirely of mainstream social media applications. Here we discuss a number of possible ways in which online discourse might be better supported, largely through more scaffolded or curated experiences, which might be afforded by dedicated debate applications rather than general purpose social media applications. Furthermore, we challenge current perceptions of second screens and imagine new possibilities for technology to make the experience more inclusive.

Encouraging Participation

It was clear from our interviews that the mechanics of the social media applications being used played a large part in determining how likely participants were to contribute. Factors at play included the perceived audience, impact, effort and normative rules governing the network. These considerations could at times be crippling, leading participants to agonise over draft messages, or more often simply withdraw from the conversation. However, these opinions varied dramatically: some of the participants were apprehensive about taking part in an online discussion, while others saw it as an opportunity to develop their ideas.

As we saw in the study, participants' Facebook accounts were connected with their friends and family, which had the effect of discouraging some of the participants from posting their opinions knowing that they may be perceived negatively. Twitter posed a different set of challenges, such as the perception that *"it can go badly"* (P1) if you post controversial views or get into an argument with strangers. As previous research has observed, there is no coherent notion of the audience an individual thinks is communicating with online [18], leading to a variety of behaviours based on the individual perceptions of the viewer. These issues form part of a much greater problem concerning abusive behaviour online that defies any straightforward design solution, requiring further research on behavioural norms online.

In light of this, many viewers may benefit from a more scaffolded experience, designed to guide participation in ways that are simple and effective, building confidence and reducing barriers. One way to achieve this might be to offer more structured avenues for contributing content, as having complete freedom can often cause anxiety. Structuring the format of posts may have additional benefits that ease producing content, such as shortening content generation time and supporting the process of reflection. One major challenge would be to find a way of scaffolding the experience in a way that does not deter from the user's ability to enter into discourse with others.

Conflicting and Reaffirming Opinions

There is an interesting tension between the participants' desire to curate their online experience and their desire to gauge the public's opinion. Although the content on social media needed to be diverse, provocative content was disliked. Participants with existing high levels of political engagement eliminated this factor by creating a highly curated online experience for themselves and selecting specific circles of people to interact with and learn from. Although this had the effect of exposing them to more informed commentary, it decreased access to broader public opinion. This created the so-called "echo chamber" effect, where people gravitate towards those with similar views [9]. As previous research suggests, this serves to narrow the scope of the information that can be accessed and reflected upon by an individual, reinforcing existing beliefs [9].

Future second screen interfaces for political debates will need to strike a balance between diversity and conformity of opinion. This might be achieved using the contextual data gathered by networks about their users, such as location and age. This data could be used to help users gauge the opinion of the public in a more realistic manner, for example by allowing them to see how opinion varies around the country. As P13 mentioned, it was very valuable to see the approval from people from other parts of the country for a particular candidate, which verified his belief that the candidate had performed well. Further research is needed to evaluate the negative and positive effects that adding more contextual data to public online posts may have on the political beliefs, and perceptions of the viewer.

Curating Quality Content

Humour, integrity and immediacy were essential qualities for the content that participants wanted to read and post. Some felt that content given by politicians and online commentators had to be verified before being accepted as true or distributed further. Researching points of interest during the political broadcast posed difficulties due to the fast paced nature of the event. The content needed to be relevant to the topics discussed on screen at the time, which helped create a sense of a shared experience with viewers across the country. Future research should look into what qualities political commentary on social media need to have to be perceived as having integrity and being trustworthy.

The participants valued humour as a way to express themselves without being antagonistic and as welcomed distraction online. Humour may be useful when designing for groups with low political engagement by adding entertainment value to the debate. For example, applications that allow the easy generation of 'memes' could act as a simple way of creating discussion within the social group of a politically disengaged viewer. Past research has noted playful aspects of online political discourse [24] but it has overlooked its potential to make politics feel more accessible by the wider public. Future research may investigate whether humour can engage politically disengaged viewers.

Re-envisioning Second Screens

Although we have embraced the term 'second screens', future research should challenge the perception that personal devices play a secondary role to the broadcast debate. In the *Share Opinion* theme*,* we observed that as online discourse increases in importance, the television itself becomes secondary, acting as a metronome that brings people together and sets the topic, but that is ultimately secondary to the online discussion. In the context of political debates, we see that the viewers can take on a multitude of new roles with the use of their phones and tablets, such as fact-checkers, content contributors, activists and spectators. Furthermore, these online activities were able to spark discussion in the living room, which encourages political engagement. We may benefit from developing new terminology that would distinguish between foreground and background content rather than assuming the dominance of any one device.

We see opportunities to re-think not only the terminology of what we have called a second screen but also re-envisioning what form it can take and how it can be used may open up new possibilities for involving the public in a national conversation. We saw indications that second screens are not only personal devices, but conduits through which a group of collocated viewers can connect to online discourse, whereas most second screen applications assume a solitary user. In particular, it is worth remembering that political debates are not just watched by young, tech-savvy people, but are potentially of interest to any citizen. This creates an opportunity for researchers and designers to develop innovative connected devices for people who are not likely to interact with a smartphone or tablet. Much like one participant included her father in her scroll through tweets she read, there seems to be a great opportunity to use technology not just on an individual level but to encourage its use within a group or family dynamic. Placing a further emphasis on group discussions will add greater importance to the both the broadcasted event and the online content.

Limitations

Nearly all the participants were young, active social media users in the UK, particularly Scotland. However, research has shown similar trends in political engagement across Western Europe and North America, e.g. in the growth of web-based campaigning [13] and decline in youth engagement [11]. We thus have reason to believe that our findings may have broader applicability across this region, although further research would be needed to verify this.

Although our sample size is relatively small, this was necessary to capture in-depth experiences as opposed to more shallow observations, and our qualitative approach is modelled on other similar work into second screens [19] and social media in political deliberation [23]. We approach this work not with the intention of contributing a definitive picture of second screen behaviours, but rather to develop insights into current usage that can be used to design new applications and interfaces for engagement with debates.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that TV debates and the Internet will continue to play a significant role in political discourse. Even at the time of writing, US presidential nominations dominate both traditional and online media around the world. While the increasing role of social media allows more people than ever to share opinions, many challenges remain in making these opinions heard. It remains important, therefore, to understand how existing technologies can evolve to support improved discourse.

By examining motivations and frustrations around second screen usage during political debates, this research has contributed a more nuanced understanding of these behaviours than can be gleaned from examining social media content alone. Observations and interviews with participants revealed a wide range of motivations, including gauging the public's opinion, enriching the debate and sharing one's own opinion. These in turn point to future directions for research, such as the potential for humour to make political discourse more inclusive and the need to re-evaluate the implied hierarchy between devices in the phrase *second screens*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was funded by a studentship from the EPSRC Doctoral Training Partnership.

EPSRC DATA ACCESS STATEMENT

Interview data was not cleared for archiving by participants. Queries relating to data access can be addressed to the authors.

REFERENCES

1. Anstead, N. and O'Loughlin, B. (2011). The emerging viewertariat and BBC Question Time: television debate and real-time commenting online. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 16, 4, 440–462. http://doi.org/10.1177/1940161211415519
2. Ausserhofer, J. and Maireder, A. (2013). National politics on Twitter: structures and topics of a networked public sphere. *Information, Communication and Society* 16, 3, 291–314. http://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.756050
3. Bakker, T. (2013). *Citizens as Political Participants: The Myth of the Active Online Audience?* PhD Thesis, University of Amsterdam. http://doi.org/11245/1.384371
4. BBC News. 2015. How the internet reacted to the leaders' debate. Retrieved January 18, 2016 from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2015-32174120

5. Brooker, P., Vines, J., Sutton, S., Barnett, J., Feltwell, T. and Lawson, S. (2015). Debating poverty porn on Twitter: social media as a place for everyday socio-political talk. In *Proc. CHI 2015*, 3177–3186. http://doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702291
6. Bruns, A. and Burgess, J. (2011). #Ausvotes: how twitter covered the 2010 Australian federal election. *Communication, Politics & Culture* 44, 2, 37–56.
7. Cameron, J. and Geidner, N. (2014). Something old, something new, something borrowed from something blue: experiments on dual viewing TV and Twitter. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 58, 3, 400–419. http://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2014.935852
8. Crossley, J. (2015). How did social media influence the general election? Retrieved August 11, 2015 from http://www.harvard.co.uk/2015/06/how-did-social-media-influence-the-general-election/
9. Doris-Down, A., Versee, H. and Gilbert, E. (2013). Political Blend: an application designed to bring people together based on political differences. In *Proc. C&T 2013*, 120–130. http://doi.org/10.1145/2482991.2483002
10. Doughty, M., Rowland, D. and Lawson, S. (2012). Who is on your sofa? TV audience communities and second screening social networks. In *Proc. EuroITV 2012*, 79–86. http://doi.org/10.1145/2325616.2325635
11. Esser, F. and de Vreese, C.H. (2007). Comparing young voters' political engagement in the United States and Europe. *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, 9, 1195–1213. http://doi.org/10.1177/0002764207299364
12. Ferrario, M., Simm, W., Whittle, J., Rayson, P., Terzi, M. and Binner, J. (2012). Understanding actionable knowledge in social media: BBC Question Time and Twitter. In *Proc. AIII '12,* 455–458.
13. Gibson, R.K., Margolis, M., Resnick, D. and Ward, S. J. (2003). Election campaigning on the WWW in the USA and UK: a comparative analysis. *Party Politics* 9, 1, 47–75. http://doi.org/10.1177/135406880391004
14. Hendricks, J. and Frye, J. (2013) Social media and the Millennial generation in the 2010 midterm election. In *Social Media Usage and Impact*, 183–199.
15. Kreiss, D. (2014). Seizing the moment: The presidential campaigns' use of Twitter during the 2012 electoral cycle. *New Media & Society*. http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814562445
16. Larsson, A. and Moe, H. (2012). Studying political microblogging: Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign. *Information, Communication and Society* 14, 5, 729–747. http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811422894
17. Mancini, P. (2015). Why it is time to redesign our political system. *European View* 14, 1, 69–75. http://doi.org/10.1007/s12290-015-0343-9
18. Marwick, A. and Boyd, D (2010). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*.13, 1, 114–133. http://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313
19. Nandakumar, A. and Murray, J. (2014). Companion apps for long arc TV series: supporting new viewers in complex storyworlds with tightly synchronized context-sensitive annotations. In *Proc. TVX 2014*, 3–10. http://doi.org/10.1145/2602299.2602317
20. Narasimhan, N. and Vasudevan, V. (2012). Descrambling the social TV echo chamber. In *Proc. MCSS 2012*, 33–38. http://doi.org/10.1145/2307863.2307873
21. Proulx, M. and Shepatin, S. (2012). Social TV. How Markets Can Reach and Engage Audiences by Connecting Television to the Web*, Social Media and Mobile.* John Wiley & Sons.
22. Schirra, S., Sun, H. and Bentley, F. (2014). Together alone: motivations for live-tweeting a television series. In *Proc. CHI 2014*, 2441–2450. http://doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557070
23. Semaan, B., Faucett, H., Robertson, S., Maruyama, M. and Douglas, S. (2015). Designing political deliberation environments to support interactions in the public sphere. In *Proc. CHI 2015*, 3167–3176. http://doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702403
24. Shamma, D., Kennedy, L. and Churchill, E. (2009). Tweet the debates: understanding community annotation of uncollected sources. In *Proc. WSM 2009*, 3–10. http://doi.org/10.1145/1631144.1631148
25. Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy. (2015). Digital Democracy Report. Retrieved August 21, 2015 from http://www.digitaldemocracy.parliament.uk/
26. Trilling, D. (2015). Two different debates? Investigating the relationship between a political debate on TV and simultaneous comments on Twitter. *Social Science Computer Review* 33, 3, 259–276. http://doi.org/10.1177/0894439314537886
27. @Twitter UK (2015). Retrieved August 25, 2015. https://twitter.com/TwitterUK/status/596572053085495296
28. Walker, P. (2015). General election 2015: the drama behind the leaders' debates. Retrieved August 12, 2015 from: http://gu.com/p/46pph/sbl
29. Wohn, Y. and Na, E. (2011). Tweeting about TV: Sharing television viewing experiences via social media message streams. *First Monday* 6, 3. http://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v16i3.3368