

Discussing televised election debates on social media increases political engagement, new study finds

November 19 2015



People who use social media to discuss broadcast election debates are more likely to become engaged in politics as a result, a recent study by researchers at Royal Holloway, University of London's New Political Communication Unit has found.

The study's authors Dr Cristian Vaccari, Professor Andrew Chadwick and Professor Ben O'Loughlin, found that people who commented on the debates live on [social media](#) and who followed the conversation through Twitter hashtags were more likely to increase their levels of political engagement during the campaign period.

Twitter users who actively participated in the discussion about the debates on social media came away from those discussions more energised and engaged with politics. In contrast, those who followed the debates in more passive ways, such as simply watching or listening live, or only reading about the debates on social media, did not become more engaged.

The researchers studied social media users who tweeted about the radio and television [debates](#) between Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage during the 2014 European Parliament elections. They then surveyed a representative sample of these individuals twice— immediately after the televised debate and immediately after the election.

Professors Vaccari, Chadwick and O'Loughlin, said: "Politicians and sceptical commentators often claim that discussions on social media are, at best, white noise and, at worst, shouting matches. Our findings suggest that big broadcast media events now combine with social media discussion in ways that can be positive for democracy."

"Publicly available social media data are abundant and convenient and they can lead to many important insights. However, on their own, 'big data' cannot reliably reveal much about individuals' motivations, attitudes, and political behaviour. Our unique research design allowed us to open up this black box and identify some positive implications of dual screening for citizen engagement."

The study, part of an ongoing project on dual screening and politics, is published in the *Journal of Communication*.

More information: Cristian Vaccari et al. Dual Screening the Political: Media Events, Social Media, and Citizen Engagement, *Journal of Communication* (2015). [DOI: 10.1111/jcom.12187](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12187)

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

Citation: Discussing televised election debates on social media increases political engagement, new study finds (2015, November 19) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-11-discussing-televised-election-debates-social.html>

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