

Abstract

Migration is a highly politicized topic in Europe. Especially since migration movements to Europe in 2015, the issue has been a top priority on public and political agendas. Furthermore, research shows that the depiction of the topic affects public opinion, knowledge, and attitudes towards migration and migrants. While existing studies mainly focus on traditional media and traditional channels of political communication, social media are largely neglected. As social media platforms gained importance when it comes to public debates as well as political campaigning, this dissertation sheds light on political migration discourses on social media. Investigating the content of accounts from political actors in different European countries, the characteristics of discourses and the role of users are unveiled. Study 1 finds the visibility of migration to be increased in the Facebook communication of political actors in countries with a positive net migration. Moreover, the results show a pattern of increased visibility and more negative sentiment across both extremes of the political scale. The second study connects content with user behavior by investigating how users respond to migration discourses in the scope of the platforms' interaction measures, showing that security is a frame frequently chosen by politicians on Facebook and Twitter. While right-wing actors get many interactions for different frames they implement, left-wing actors' audiences respond less to the security framing of the migration discourse. Study 3 furthermore ties the platform behavior of users to attitudes. Results show that migration-related social media communication from political actors implementing frames that correspond with subaspects of migration that constituents hold negative attitudes towards are more likely to get interacted with. Lastly, the fourth study considers the news-sharing behavior of political actors, illuminating the dynamics of the topic on social media in the context of other issues. While the topic itself is not found to be a strong predictor of shares by political actors on Facebook, the findings demonstrate that politicians are more likely to share news articles featuring their party or topics associated with their party as well as articles from outlets that their constituents consume frequently. In sum, this dissertation adds to the understanding of public migration discourses by investigating the dynamics of political migration discourses on social media. Analyzing a – thus far largely neglected – part of public discourses, the studies complement the existing literature by incorporating social media platforms. In addition, this dissertation demonstrates the use of innovative automated methods to investigate large-scale social media data to achieve meaningful results.