

The impact of social media appearances during election campaigns

Completed Research Paper

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ABSTRACT

With social media services gaining importance in recent years, political institutions are continuously incorporating this development especially during elective campaigns. In the present empirical study, we use the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) to conceptualize the level of acceptance of social media appearances. To identify differences when dealing with politically motivated social media appearances, seven hypotheses are derived and tested. We identified the seven most important social media services in Germany and globally and used an adaptive conjoint-analysis to extract 33 major functions of these services. Controlled by four moderators, multiple analyses of variances expose significant differences referring to effects of UTAUT determinants and thereby towards *Behavioral Intention* as well as *Use Behavior*. As elections took place in the USA or will be held in the near future in Germany, these results can be the basis to conduct additional transnational comparative studies in a further step.

Keywords

Social media services, social networks, politics, elections, election campaigns, Web 2.0.

INTRODUCTION

Internet-based communication platforms were used extensively by Senator Barack Obama during his elective campaign in preparation of the 55th United States presidential election in 2008. For the first time these kind of interactive channels were examined by researchers as they were recognized as a tool of major influence which could have a significant impact on the final vote (O'Mera, 2008; Smith, 2009). One year later, the presidential election served as a model for German parties and politicians as they heavily increased the use of social media during the elections for the Bundestag. However, due to their lack of experience with managing these communication channels appropriately, German parties could not benefit as much as their American counterparts (von Pape and Quandt, 2010).

On the one hand they were not able to integrate this new approach into their overall offline-strategy and on the other hand they could not properly handle social media to develop its full potential. Retrospectively, it seems to be obvious that no political protagonist capitalized on an effective social media strategy as measured by typical elements such as dynamic processes, interaction or direct contact and communication (O'Reilly, 2005). Furthermore, German campaigns had concentrated on adopting US-American approaches. Meanwhile, Karlsen (2010) transferred nine significant differences of campaigning styles in the US and Europe to the social media world which Plasser and Plasser (2002) had identified in offline surroundings earlier.

The main objective of this study is to analyze which elements and functions of social media services are favored and how they should be applied to develop their full potential in political contexts. We use the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as a theoretical concept to identify essential insights which can increase the level of acceptance of politically motivated social media appearances (Venkatesh et al., 2003). At this point, our study concentrates on Germany but globally-known social media services (e.g. Facebook) are integrated to make this study applicable to future intercultural research designs.

Our methodology is based upon two key elements to test seven hypotheses which refer to the influence of the UTAUT moderators towards its determinants. First, we identify the most important social media services and conduct an adaptive conjoint-analysis with students as a main target group to extract the relevance of certain functions offered by these services. Second, our empirical approach provides several one-way analyses of variances to measure the level of significance of all four UTAUT determinants. By doing this, we set the basis to apply UTAUT and to answer the following research question: *Can social media appearances play a significant role during election campaigns?*

THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION

This section contains a brief definition of our understanding of social media services and appearances, our underlying theoretical model (setting be the basis for further intercultural research projects) and the hypotheses we are going to test.

Definition of social media services

The term social media service is often linked to social networks or even more frequently to Web 2.0 (Chiang et al., 2009). However, according to Lim and Palacios-Marques (2011) “no unified definition about Web 2.0 exists”, neither for social media services nor for networks. Thus, a useful exposure to these kinds of services is to focus on general characteristics like participation or collaboration. For this study, politically motivated appearances within social media areas are understood as an overall strategy using multiple social media services to achieve “a more intense and therefore more democratic form of dialogue and exchange of information between politicians, political parties and institutions, on the one hand, and citizens, on the other” (Hooghe and Teepe, 2007; Coleman, 2005). Even though the tenor of this definition can be easily associated with the principles of younger parties in Germany like the aspiring Pirate Party, this study explicitly operates above party line because nowadays most of the major parties are already engaging in this field.

Different types of acceptance models

In general, acceptance models are used to describe relations between specific key factors and their influence towards positive or negative affections of a certain environment. Within the field of information systems these models focus on technology acceptance in particular. A widely known example is the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and its modification (TAM2) which both concentrate on the effects of Perceived Usefulness and Perceived ease of Use on the potential and actual usage (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh and Davis, 2000).

In addition to these predominantly activity-orientated elements, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Fishbein and Ajzen takes a different type into account which arises from a deeper psychological level (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Especially the constructs Attitude toward the behavior and opinions of referent others (Subjective norm) contain important aspects relating to our research question because of the characteristics of social media services mentioned above. TAM and TRA as well as other acceptance models put their specific focus on a different behavioral level but neither orientation should be ignored in this research field. Both the individual behavior relating to social media (represented in TAM) and possible group effects such as pressure, forcing a user to adopt a technological system (measured with TRA), must be examined.

UTAUT as an integrated approach to measure technology acceptance

UTAUT is a model to integrate common approaches like TRA or TAM and others within a single, unified concept (Venkatesh et al., 2003). Table 1 provides an overview of all behavioral models that form the basis of UTAUT:

Model name	Developer	Years	Acronym
Theory of Reasoned Action	Fishbein, Ajzen	1975, '80	TRA
Technology Acceptance Model	Davis	1986, '89	TAM
Motivational Model	Davis, Bagozzi, Warshaw	1992	MM
Theory of Planned Behavior	Ajzen	1985	TPB
Combined TAM and TPB	Taylor, Todd	1995	C-TAM-TPB
Innovation Diffusion Theory	Moore, Benbasat	1991	IDT
Social Cognitive Theory	Compeau, Higgins	1995	SCT

Table 1. Behavioral and Acceptance Models that constitute UTAUT

Because these models (Table 1) only discuss acceptance from different individual, cognitive or interpersonal perspectives, we decided to build this study on UTAUT as a unified theory. As it connects individual advantages of all concepts, it is able to measure the level of acceptance of certain technologies more adequately (Venkatesh et al., 2003). This is important for our goals as we need a theoretical basis that offers a holistic framework to measure many different types of influencing factors.

All of them are relevant when it comes to the (non-) usage of social media services and especially the frequently used TAM disregards social and group effects which seem to be very important in this research field. For example, Bagozzi (2007) demonstrates the relevance of cultural impacts based on this model.

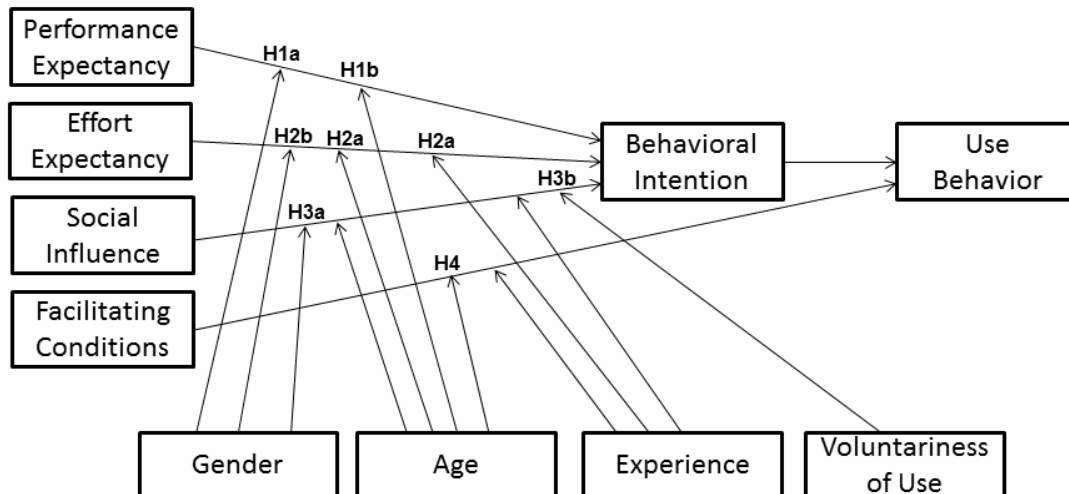


Figure 1. Research model

UTAUT consists of four major determinants – *Performance Expectancy*, *Effort Expectancy*, *Social Influence* and *Facilitating Conditions* – that can directly affect the *Use Behavior* or indirectly through *Behavioral Intention*. For our study, we understand these two dependent constructs as the intention to interact or the actual interaction with a political social media appearance. Furthermore, each determinant is influenced by at least two of the following key moderators: *Gender*, *Age*, *Experience* and *Voluntariness of Use*. The entire model including our underlying hypotheses is presented in Figure 1.

Derivation of hypotheses referring to the determinants of UTAUT

By applying UTAUT to our research question, the four determinants (Figure 1) can explain why users behave or intent to behave on social media platforms in a certain way. These first insights can assist political institutions to adjust their appearances. To address these effects and measure them adequately later on, we state the following seven hypotheses:

The first determinant *Performance Expectancy* reflects the level of confidence a user has in a technology or system. Being “the strongest predictor of intention”, Venkatesh et al. (2003) emphasize its importance within UTAUT. As factors moderating the effect of performance expectations towards the Behavioral Intention, UTAUT refers to *Gender* and *Age*. With respect to *Gender*, several studies claim that men and women use the internet in different manners. Setting the focus on Germany, a study on behalf of the two public television stations reveals a gap of 15% between both genders which clearly favors men with respect to the range of internet-based applications they use (ARD/ZDF, 2011). This assumption leads us to the first hypothesis within the political environment:

H1a: Male individuals expect a wider scope of social media functions used by political campaigns than women.

Another important UTAUT moderator that affects *Performance Expectancy* is *Age*. According to the Federal Statistical Office in Germany, nearly 40% of the population is older than 50 years (DESTATIS, 2009). However, only a quarter of them use the Internet on a regular basis – the others cannot be reached by political social media appearances a priori – whereas we can assume a nearly 100% penetration within the group of people younger than 50 years (ARD/ZDF, 2011). Following these numbers, we hypothesize with regard to our research question:

H1b: The older an individual is, the less he or she finds merit in politically driven social media appearances.

The second determinant *Effort Expectancy* combines elements of TAM and IDT (Perceived ease of use) as well as MPCU (Complexity) and puts them together to describe the effort a user must invest to handle a technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003). In terms of our research topic, we have to measure the effort one has to put in to gain access to a social media service and the necessary technological requirements (e.g. equipment or devices). Level of *Experience* is one of the key moderators for this

determinant; as stated before, it is not linked to *Age*, though. We assume that younger people are more experienced with the usage of social media services and must invest less effort to capitalize on them.

H2a: A higher level of experience - especially of younger users - leads to less effort one has to invest in order to gain access to politically driven social media appearances.

In order to be capable of handling the moderator *Experience* in a next step, we had to operationalize it at first. Even though it is not the only reliable indicator, we assume a positive correlation between a rising level of experience and frequent internet usage over time. However, while UTAUT proposes gender differences as it is easier for men to gain access to the internet in general, we refuse this argumentation with regard to the usage of social media services. Nowadays, there is no natural hurdle for female users to take part in social media services apart from their own choice to ignore them. Therefore we expect that:

H2b: Gender differences will not have a significant impact on the effort users have to invest to gain access to politically driven social media appearances.

The third UTAUT determinant, *Social Influence*, is important in this research field because social media services are predominantly interactive and offer new communication channels (Walther et al., 2008). With many relatives and friends participating in certain social media services, we assume that the surroundings of a user play an important role if he or she considers enrolling in a service, too (Ecclestone and Griseri, 2008). Especially unskilled users tend to bow to peer pressure, so we expect a significant disparity with regard to the technological experience. We assume our political setting to foster this effect even more because it's an area with opinions and convictions being highly dominant:

H3a: Inexperienced social media users tend to be more influenced by others than experienced users, with politically motivated social media appearances to foster this effect.

The moderator *Voluntariness of Use* can be utilized to differentiate between users who spend their time with a social media service voluntarily and those who have to use it for business reasons. If a user has to integrate social media services into his daily working routines, e.g. to work together with other colleagues in a collaborative intranet environment, we assume that he or she tends to be less influenced by social relations in private ambience:

H3b: The lower the level of voluntariness of a user is, the lower is his receptiveness for political social media appearances.

The last determinant, *Facilitating Conditions*, was derived by Venkatesh et al. (2003) from multiple acceptance models UTAUT is based on (e.g. Perceived behavioral control of TPB and C-TAM-TPB, *Facilitating Conditions* of MCPU or Compatibility of IDT). As many aspects in this area are already covered by *Performance Expectancy*, the authors describe a direct influence of *Facilitating Conditions* towards the actual behavior on a social media platform but not towards the intention to potentially use it. In this study, we determine the level of political interest within this category, with *Age* being the key moderator. Predominantly, younger people show a lack of interest for political topics which means that parties are potentially struggling to attract this user group (Walther et al., 2008).

H4: Younger users with less interest in political topics are tougher to address with politically motivated social media appearances in contrast to older ones.

RESEARCH METHOD

This section explains our research methodology consisting of a split questionnaire with a) an adaptive conjoint-analysis and b) rating questions on Likert scales as well as several Analyses of Variances (ANOVAs).

General survey settings

To test our hypotheses with several ANOVAs, we developed a questionnaire with two major sections:

The first section is used for an adaptive conjoint-analysis to examine *Performance Expectancy* in detail. Thereby we cope with the dominant role of this determinant which we explained earlier. We conduct an adaptive conjoint-analysis to identify those functions of social media services that play the most important role for the users and, therefore, meet their performance expectations best. The second section of the questionnaire is built up of questions relating to the other determinants mostly using Likert-scales. Furthermore, demographic user data was surveyed at the end to handle the four UTAUT moderators.

Although this setting is vulnerable to a sample bias, we focused on students as our main target group to test the basic functionality of our model (Bortz and Döring, 2006). Members of this group are not only very familiar with social media services in general as they grew up with them but they are also of high political interest due to their level of education

(Pempek et al., 2009; Hillygus, 2005). However, it will be necessary to widen the range of our target group within further (intercultural) studies.

We decided to use an online survey as it is necessary to access computer-assistance when applying an adaptive form of a conjoint-analysis. This is in line with our research question as you need access to the internet in order to use social media services. The link to our questionnaire was distributed through various communication channels including online forums, appropriate groups within social networks sites (e.g. groups containing political discussions) and Twitter, but also via offline invitations at several universities and viral announcements to avoid data bias.

Adaptive conjoint-analysis to measure performance expectations of social media services

To deal with the UTAUT determinant *Performance Expectancy*, we had to figure out which features of social media services are most appreciated by its users. A conjoint-analysis is a suitable method to split higher-ranking feature categories (groups) into several attributes (functions) which receive an individual value by users' decision (Johnson, 1987; Green and Rao, 1971). While a user has to categorize every possible feature combination in a full-profile approach (e.g. choice based), a trade-off approach is supported by computer calculations to reduce the necessary amount of comparisons (Johnson, 1987). We applied the adaptive conjoint-analysis to avoid the "possibility of information overload" (Green and Srinivasan, 1978), one can expect because of the huge diversity of social media services and its functions.

In a first step, we had to identify the main social media services that were used in Germany compared to the worldwide rankings. Referring to traffic ranks and page views as well as the ALEXA ranking (2010), we arranged a top ten list of different service types like social media networks, blogging services, picture- and video-sharing services (Table 2).

Germany		Global	
Rank	Website	Rank	Website
3	Facebook (www.facebook.com)	2	Facebook (www.facebook.com)
4	YouTube (www.youtube.com)	3	YouTube (www.youtube.com)
11	Twitter (www.twitter.com)	11	Twitter (www.twitter.com)
15	StudiVZ (www.studivz.de)	19	MySpace (www.myspace.com)
16	XING (www.xing.de)	30	LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com)
20	Wer-kennt-wen (www.wer-kennt-wen.de/)	31	Flickr (www.flickr.com)
21	MeinVZ (www.meinvz.net)	64	Orkut (www.orkut.com)
24	MySpace (www.myspace.com)	68	hi5 (www.hi5.com)
31	SchuelerVZ (www.schuelervz.net)	154	Tagged (www.tagged.com)
39	Flickr (www.flickr.com)	229	XING (www.xing.de)

Table 2. Top ten ranking of social media services in Germany and worldwide

We decided to vary the social media service type and, therefore, to analyze the features of the highest ranked social networks (*Facebook*, *MySpace*, *Xing*, *LinkedIn* and *StudiVZ*), video-platform (*YouTube*) and blogging-service (*Twitter*). According to Wattal et al. (2010) this approach is reasonable because diverse services can trigger different "properties and capabilities" resulting in different use behaviors. Each service was then examined individually and a list of 33 main functions could be created by matching the results of every service. We tested various other services from the ALEXA ranking as well but could not identify any additional main functions. Therefore, we rearranged all functions and spread them to eight groups which are the basis of the adaptive conjoint-analysis (Table 3).

At the beginning of our questionnaire, the respondents had to classify the relevance of each function within a certain group based on their personal preferences; the opportunity to suspend a function was not allowed as all of them should be judged (Herrmann et al., 2003). All functions were measured using a nine-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (absolutely irrelevant) to 9 (absolutely necessary). In a second step the participants were asked to rank each group relative to one another as they had to specify the distance between the most and least important function of a group. The adaptive conjoint processor of the survey tool then calculates two virtual social media services which contain different functions of the same groups; at the beginning of this decompositional part, functions of two groups, in later stages three and four groups are presented (Green et al., 1991). The participant had to compare and weigh these fictitious services while up to 30 new ones are generated based on his or her

replies. Finally, the users' ratings were calibrated and we received individual, calibrated values for every function and the relative importance of each group.

Group	Functions	Group	Functions
Profile	Personal Information	Picture	Picture Galleries
	Status Message		Picture-to-User Linkage
	Events & Meetings		Picture Information
	Guestbook & Pinboard		Picture Annotation
Video	Video Categorisation	Extras	Applications
	Channel Subscription		Games
	Playlists		Links
	Video Annotation		Chats
	Rating		Premium Accounts
	RSS-Feeds (Video)		Mobile Access
Data Privacy	Profile Restrictions	Blog	Blog Post
	Status Message		RSS Feeds (Blogs)
	Events & Meetings		Blog Subscription
	Guestbook & Pinboard		Blog Annotation
User Link-Up	User-to-User Communication	Collaboration	Discussion Forum
	Profile Linkage		Diary Management
	Groups		

Table 3. Classification of the 33 main functions into eight superordinate groups

User behaviour on social media services

While the adaptive conjoint-analysis was used to deal with *Performance Expectancy*, the three remaining UTAUT determinants were investigated with direct questions in the second part of the survey. The participants had to state for each of the seven examined social media services whether they use it or not. Depending on the answers, it was their task to categorize the degree of difficulty on a Likert scale regarding the registration process and the overall handling of a certain service. This section of the questionnaire is used to explain the determinant *Effort Expectancy*. Similarly, *Social Influence* and *Facilitating Conditions* were measured. On the one hand the responders had to answer questions referring to the use of social media service within their social surroundings. On the other hand they had to state if there are specific reasons why they use social media services (e.g. job-related purposes).

RESULTS

In the following section of this study, we present the most relevant functions of social media services as results of the adaptive conjoint-analysis and then test our hypotheses with several ANOVAs.

Selection and categorization of participants

After a period of six weeks, our questionnaire was completely and correctly filled out by 173 participants with an average response time of 24.5 minutes. We checked their data reliability with t-tests using the coefficient of determination (R^2) we received from the conjoint-analysis results. Therefore, this study is based on a final sample of $n=134$ as we had to refuse 39 participants whose response behavior was not consistent on a 1% level of significance. This meets the recommendation of Martens' scale regarding the coefficient of determination (Martens, 2003).

As the setting of UTAUT defines, we used the four key moderators within this study to cluster the participants into groups. The UTAUT determinant *Gender* is explained by the demographical user data and its general trend correlates with the literature (ARD/ZDF, 2001): 48 participants (35%) are female and 86 (64%) are male. Since we chose students as our target group for this test, the age pattern ranges between 18 and 30 years in general with only a few participants being older than 40 years. We divided all participants into four groups using quartile rankings in order to deal with the UTAUT determinant *Age*. Level of *Experience* and *Voluntariness of Use* were classified through multiple survey questions. We distributed points for a frequent and periodic use of the examined social media services, analogue to our six-point measuring scale ranging from 6 points for a frequent and regular use to 1 point if a participant uses a service only occasionally. Voluntariness was measured with several questions related to a participants' use structure. The less the participant is forced to use social media services (e.g. for business reasons), the more points he or she received. Again, both overall results were divided into four groups based on the quartiles. To avoid equal scores in different quartiles, we slightly varied the number of participants within the groups. The final classification is presented in Table 4:

Group Name	Criteria	N = 134
Gender	Male	86
	Female	48
Age	Age \leq 21 years	36
	22 years \leq Age \leq 24 years	33
	25 years \leq Age \leq 27 years	38
	28 years \leq Age	27
Experience	Experience Points (EP) \leq 16	28
	17 \leq EP \leq 21	38
	22 \leq EP \leq 26	36
	27 \leq EP	32
Voluntariness of Use	Voluntariness Points (VP) \leq 5	32
	6 \leq VP \leq 8	37
	VP = 9	27
	10 \leq VP	38

Table 4. Classification of participants based on the four UTAUT moderators

Adaptive conjoint-analysis

The calibrated values for every function we received from the adaptive conjoint-analysis were normalized and scaled in order to facilitate inter-group comparisons as all functions are arranged within the same scope. Furthermore, this allows us to match the relative relevance of each group as well (Johnson, 1987). Table 5 shows the calibrated, normalized and scaled values of the functions and the relative importance of each group.

Our results illustrate a major importance of the groups Profile (16.23%) and Extras (17.57%) with Personal Information and Chats being most relevant for the social media users. In addition, there is a considerable difference between the two groups Pictures (12.05%) and Videos (10.32%), even though they contain similar types of functions. The creation of in-depth content such as Blog Posts (7.95), Video Categorization (6.24) or Discussion Forums (8.55) is relevant, independent of its respective group importance. Within the group Data Privacy (10.55%), Profile Restrictions obtain the highest value of 7.67.

Group (relative importance)	Function	Value (scaled & normalized)
Profile (16.23 %)	Personal Information	14.16
	Status Message	6.05
	Events & Meetings	6.36
	Guestbook & Pinboard	5.87
Picture (12.05 %)	Picture Galleries	8.57
	Picture-to-User Linkage	5.76
	Picture Information	5.86
	Picture Annotation	4.89
Video (10.32 %)	Video Categorization	6.24
	Channel Subscription	4.10
	Playlists	5.52
	Video Annotation	6.26
	Rating	6.85
	RSS-Feeds (Video)	3.73
User Link-Up (12.61 %)	User-to-User Communication	11.83
	Profile Linkage	5.39
	Groups	2.6
Blog (10.29 %)	Blog Post	7.95
	RSS Feeds (Blogs)	3.16
	Blog Subscription	4.37
	Blog Annotation	6.37
Collaboration (10.36 %)	Discussion Forum	8.55
	Diary Management	2.73
Extras (17.57 %)	Applications	9.84
	Games	6.23
	Links	11.75
	Chats	13.75
	Premium Accounts	2.30
	Mobile Access	9.92
Data Privacy (10.55 %)	Profile Restrictions	7.67
	Profile Linkage Prohibition	4.48
	Contact Restrictions	4.11
	User Blacklist	5.54
	Personal Information	14.16

Table 5. Results of the adaptive conjoint-analysis

ANOVAs to test our hypotheses

To test our hypotheses within the UTAUT model, we conducted several one-way analyses of variances (ANOVA). We first applied the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to check whether our data is normally distributed and proved homoscedasticity with Levene's test to meet the requirements of this method. The first ANOVA was used to analyze if gender differences lead to a divergent scope of social media functions (Hypothesis 1a). We took *Gender* as the independent variable and the individual

relative importance of a certain group from the conjoint-analysis as the dependent variable. On the 5% - level of significance, our results show that differences occur within the groups User Link-Up and on the 10% - level in the groups Profile and Video. We repeated multiple ANOVAs for the UTAUT moderator *Age* to measure its influence on *Performance Expectancy* as well as for the remaining determinants and its respective affecting moderators. Table 6 provides an overview of our results including significance values.

Group		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Sig.
User Link-Up	Between groups	341.845	1	341.845	0.032
	Within groups	3403.700	32	25.786	
	Total	3745.545	133		
Profile	Between groups	135.978	1	135.978	0.06
	Within groups	37.713	32	37.713	
	Total	514.126	133		
Video	Between groups	52.808	1	52.808	0.064
	Within groups	2000.725	32	15.157	
	Total	2053.533	133		

Table 6. One-way ANOVA of the UTAUT determinant Performance Expectancy
(selected results referring to the moderator Gender)

Group		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Sig.
Experience	Between groups	3241.939	3	1080.646	0.035
	Within groups	2481.404	30	19.088	
	Total	5723.343	133		
Voluntariness of Use	Between groups	3431.547	3	1143.849	0.041
	Within groups	2291.796	30	17.629	
	Total	5723.343	133		

Table 7. One-way ANOVA of the UTAUT determinant Social Influence

Group		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Sig.
Age	Between groups	37.605	3	12.535	0.049
	Within groups	606.492	30	4.665	
	Total	644.097	133		

Table 8. One-way ANOVA of the UTAUT determinant Facilitating Conditions

On the 95%-confidence interval, we verified further significant differences related to the UTAUT determinant *Social Influence* with respect to the level of *Experience* as well as *Voluntariness of Use* (Table 7). Furthermore, the results show that *Age* moderates the Facilitating Conditions, which means political interest in this study (Table 8). Hypothesis H1a is supported because we could prove some significant gender differences with regard to major social media functions. Comparisons show that male participants, on average, rated group values and related functions higher than female (e.g. the value of the most relevant group Profile is rated with an average score of 16.99 by male and only 14.88 by female). H1b is rejected as there is no argument for *Age* being a hurdle to access (politically motivated) social media appearances. Both *Age* and *Experience* do not have an impact on the expected effort a user has to invest in order use a social media service; thus H2a has to be refused but H2b is confirmed. We could identify a significant effect of the user's experience towards *Social Influence* as well (H3a is confirmed). A deeper analysis of our results made clear that the first quartile, representing the inexperienced users, is affected by social surrounding twice as much as the others. We also found the same effect for users who deal with social media services for business reasons in contrast to the rest, supporting H3b. In the end, our results confirm that a majority of younger users is less interested in political topics than older ones (H4).

DISCUSSION

Findings

In this study, we analyze which functions of social media services have an impact on users' acceptance and therefore – with regard to UTAUT – influence their *Behavioral Intention* to use such services. We applied an adaptive conjoint-analysis to identify these functions and to explain the UTAUT determinant *Performance Expectancy*. Referring to the original research question and the aim of this study, our results demonstrate that social media appearances can play a significant role during election campaigns. From what we found, political campaigns in Germany should focus on individual profiles including personal information of their top candidates and interactive elements at first. Especially user-to-user communication (e.g. personal message functions) and multi-user chats should be adopted to keep direct contact with potential voters as well as cross references to appearances on other services via links. This means, in terms of UTAUT, that *Behavioral Intention* of a user to interact with political motivated social media appearances rises if these functions are implemented properly. In contrast, multimedia elements seem to be less important with pictures outranking videos.

Our results also show that there is no need for political actors to pay much attention to possible excess supply: Too many adopted functions do not raise *Effort Expectancy* and have no impact on *Behavioral Intention*. In addition, political appearances should consider addressing both experienced social media users and those who use social media services for business reasons. As we proved before, these users act upon their environment distinctively but are rarely influenced by others. That is why political actors can possibly gain attraction to a complete community behind these essential users. Finally, UTAUT describes a direct effect of the *Facilitating Conditions* – in this study political interest – towards the actual *Use Behavior*. But according to our results, younger users do not normally draw the attention to political social media appearances even though they use these services for other reasons. In order to win over younger and already active users, popular functions – like those we identified in the conjoint-analysis – should be adopted to influence their actual behavior by changing their intention first.

Limitations and Further Research

To test our model, we used students as our target group. This decision could have affected our results because it entails certain influencing factors like academic background or financial status. To prevent these factors from biasing our results we plan to stretch this study to a sample that represents a cross-section of the population. Another limitation is the cluster of functions we examined as social media services offer new opportunities in quick succession. Especially Facebook has taken over a dominant position as the leading social network site in recent years and extends its functional spectrum on a regular basis. Therefore, it is important to fall back to abstract functional groups to be capable of integrating upcoming functions to our research model more easily.

As stated in the introduction, making use of social media services for political reasons was originally established within the United States of America. Krasnova et al. (2012) summarize some cultural differences between countries that are based on varying moral concepts and which lead to individual patterns of use. According to the use of UTAUT, we developed a research model which is also suitable to identify intercultural differences. In a further study, we plan to compare the United States of America (looking back to their election in 2012) and Germany (with an election to come in September, 2013). These country-specific results could give political actors individual advice on how to arrange an optimal social media appearance in order to attain the biggest effects.

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