

How to Collect Voters' Perceptions of Election Campaigns?

Examining Digital Platforms for Qualitative Diary Postings

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Abstract:

Diary postings are responses to real-world events, actors and processes that de facto exist and can be identified. This article explores the conditions of capturing voter behaviour and voters' perceptions of election campaigns by methodologically testing innovative digital instruments for qualitative diary data collection (an app for mobile devices and a webform). We do this in light of three criteria: participant engagement, data relevance and participants' personal involvement. Based on a real-world methodological experiment in the Fall of 2019 during the Norwegian local election campaign, we found that the app promotes more engagement as to frequency of diary postings, while the webform promoted more comprehensive postings. Concerning participants with different socio-demographic and political profiles, both platforms ensured data relevance in the sense that data match the concepts to be studied: voter behaviour and perception of election campaign. Moreover, both facilitated personal involvement and reflections. The article concludes with a reflection on the potential contribution of the diary method in election studies.

Keywords: Qualitative diary method; data collection instruments; app, voter behaviour; election campaign; political science

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Ethics approval statement:

The study has been assessed and approved by NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data with regards to safeguarding privacy and research ethics guidelines.

1. Introduction

Research on voter behaviour and voters' perceptions of election campaign has a long tradition in political science and has over time produced valuable knowledge and insight (Aardal, 2017). The majority of this knowledge is based on well-established instruments for data collection, mainly representative voter surveys. There are good reasons for this strong tradition for quantitative research approaches (McNabb, 2015). However, a qualitative research approach can provide other perspectives on voter behaviour and election campaigns. Moreover, new technological developments and changes in how people communicate and interact through information and communications technology (ICT) open the window of new instruments for qualitative data collection in research as well. Research should take advantage of such changes and explore new approaches. The qualitative diary method, which has yet to gain ground in the field of election studies and in political science more general, is one of such new approaches (for a few exceptions see Kaun, 2012; Ohme, 2019; Shamshiri-Petersen, 2013a, 2013b, 2016). Complementing the established election and campaign research with diaries may constitute a valuable source of information about the subjective perceptions and the real-time contextual setting surrounding the voters. In that sense, diaries may contribute with another kind of data: in-depth information phrased by the voters themselves and thereby provide thorough insight into how voters perceive political campaigns. This can reveal how specific campaign events, issues, and actors are evaluated and employed by voters in order to substantiate their party choice.

This article explores the conditions of capturing voter behaviour and voters' perceptions of election campaigns in such a new way, by investigating two different, but innovative digital instruments for qualitative diary data collection; an app for smartphone and a webform that can be accessed with different devices (a personal computer (PC) or mobile devices including both smartphone and tablet¹).

Both the app and the webform were designed and developed specifically for this study. It is a real-world methodological experiment based on a pilot study under the Norwegian Election Diary Project (NEDP), which collected diary postings from voters during the Fall 2019 Norwegian local election campaign.²

The Norwegian context is particularly suitable for such a study and research design involving innovative technology. Norway is amid the vanguard of the global

¹ Unfortunately, metadata do not show what device the participants used.

² In Norway, The Election Diary Project is a project under The Norwegian National Election Studies (NNES) at the Institute for Social Research, funded by the Research Council of Norway (grant no. 249687). In Denmark, the project is located at the Department of Politics and Society, Aalborg University.

information society, and ICT is ubiquitous and a fundamental premise for communication and interaction at all societal levels (Eurostat, 2020). In 2013, Norwegian researchers concluded that the normalisation of social media as a communication platform for most Norwegians had affected communication in general but particularly within the political sphere (Enjolras et al., 2013). Indeed, the overall picture is that a high percentage of Norwegian citizens of all ages – except from the very oldest generations – are used to using ICT as part of their daily communication; they are used to expressing themselves by the written word, in particular through social media, SMS and messenger.

With the overall motivation to catch voters' perceptions of election campaigns, this article aims at exploring whether the digital platforms – app and web-form – are suitable as instruments for qualitative diary data collection. Furthermore, to explore whether these platforms lay down methodological conditions for high quality diary data, we compare them by using three dimensions of such conditions, and stating three research questions:

- RQ1 *Are there significant differences in participants' engagement as regards to numbers and length of diary postings across platforms?*
- RQ2 *Are the platforms equally able (or unable) to ensure data relevance as regards to reach out to participants who have different socio-demographic profiles, including so-called political out-groups?*
- RQ3 *In the sense of facilitating participants' personal involvement in diary postings, are these platforms equally suitable for supporting the diary format?*

Investigating these questions, we focus on the methodological conditions and evaluate the two platforms – the app and the webform – from such a perspective using mainly quantitative parameters for what we consider qualitatively good diary data. That is, we consider the three dimensions to have implications for the quality of the diary data which will be explained in Section 2.

In Section 3, we briefly present and discuss the literature on the diary method in relation to election studies and, regarding the above-mentioned research questions, the two platforms' potential and our expectations regarding the research questions. Then, in Section 4, the NEDP is described before we answer the research questions and discuss this study's results and implications in Sections 5 and 6.

2. Why the Diary Method in Political Science and Election Studies?

Diaries constitute valuable information sources for researchers who are aspiring to gain insight into people's perceptions of social phenomena and their contextual settings (Hyers, 2018; Kaun, 2010, Bolger, Davis, & Rafaela, 2003; Langford & West,

1999; Gershuny & Sullivan, 1998; Reis, 1994; Wheeler & Reis, 1991). As the method implies “time and space to reflect, rather than the immediate question-and-answer format of interviews or focus groups, participants can divulge more nuanced understandings of everyday subjectivities, emotions and events” (Filep et al. 2018, p. 453). Furthermore, the diary format enables capturing subjective perspectives regarding topical events, which minimises the likelihood of retrospection (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). Thus, the diary method promotes both data authenticity and contemporaneity. This allows researchers to gain first-hand information about the causal mechanisms behind voter behaviour and how such mechanisms are related to both contextual factors and the individual voter’s reflection. One explanation for the absence of the diary method is attributed to an overall priority to quantitative research approaches in political science (McNabb, 2015). This is particularly relevant in election studies, in which survey methodology forms the basis of this discipline both in Europe and the U.S.A. (Aardal, 2017). Another likely explanation is that qualitative diaries are particularly demanding. Collecting and handling the extensive amount of data generated by diaries is time-consuming for the researcher and is extremely reliant on participants’ willingness to engage in the research project. As a data collection method, diaries require participants’ consistent involvement (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003, p. 592).

However, technological developments are perceived as a way to respond to such obstacles. There are many indications that the diary method benefits from new digital technologies and the major changes in the way we communicate. As noted by Kaun (2010, p. 135), by using the internet’s technical infrastructure, research can become more efficient and potentially more informative. First, most people master ongoing, simultaneous communication by using a multitude of digital platforms. E-mail, texting, social media, phone and video calls are just some platforms through which we communicate daily. Second, this new digital communication behaviour among the general public offers a more comprehensive and varied text production than ever before (Skaar, 2009). Despite concerns about the change “from writing to image” (cf. Kress, 2003), there is little doubt that this type of frequent and continuing – often concise – text-based communication makes the written word a natural way of expressing everyday events and experiences. Third, due to, for example, Weblogs and social media, capturing, organising and sharing our lives is nowadays a usual social praxis for most people (Frigo, 2017). Narrating your personal story through self-reflection and self-reporting constitutes the root purpose of diary writing (Merry, 1979; Kaun, 2010) and is essential in much social media behaviour as well (Scheidt, 2009; Humphreys, 2018).

Thus, technological development has provided new ways for research participants to report and for researchers to collect qualitative diary data. Hence, as political scientists, to gain greater insight into political behaviour and its reasoning, we have the opportunity to engage participants by using digital platforms that are already a

significant part of their daily lives. Yet, although internet-based research has significantly increased, knowledge of how new digital platforms serve diary-based data collection methods is sparse.

3. Quality Criteria: The Potential of Digital Diary Platforms

Our point of departure for exploring the potential of digital diary platforms in political science is that quality data depends on conditions for participants' engagement, data relevance and personal involvement in diary postings, as this is a tenet of the diary method.

Nowadays, research participants can use a wide range of devices for engaging in internet-based research. Internet-enabled mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, are increasingly applied for this purpose, which is contesting the use of PCs (Revilla, 2017, p. 267; Couper, Antoun, & Mavletova, 2017). Turning to studies of devices' effects on data quality, which primarily has been done on survey data (Couper et al., 2017; Antoun et al., 2017; Keusch & Yan, 2017; Schlosser & Mays, 2018; Tourangeau et al., 2018), we expect that the app (accessed with a smartphone) and the webform (most often accessed by PC, but also accessibly by smartphone and tablet) may engage different types of participants and, consequently, resulting in different conditions for collection of qualitative diary data.

Regarding the aspect of participants' engagement and RQ1, we examined whether the two platforms differ with regard to participants' contribution (i.e., postings) to their diaries, measured by frequency, number and diary posting length. Several studies have raised concerns about mobile devices causing lesser engagement and thus poorer data quality. First, it is argued in the literature that mobile devices usually are applied in contexts that are not conducive to committed and thorough response behaviour. Whereas PCs are most often used at home or work, mobile handheld devices are often used in public places and 'on the go', which creates distractions (Deng et al., 2019; Antoun et al., 2018; Couper et al., 2017, Wells et al., 2013). Second, studies emphasise that a research design that involves mobile devices may cause completion to be far more burdensome. The same applies to people's unfamiliarity with such devices. Participants not accustomed to operating smartphones or tablets (e.g., the elderly) (Couper et al. 2017, p. 136-137) may find it difficult, leading to a nonresponse, incorrect answers, or in-completion of participation. A final concern is that respondents who use mobile devices provide significantly shorter answers to open-ended survey questions than do PC-using respondents (Struminskaya et al., 2015; Mavletova, 2013). Following these concerns, previous studies have found greater breakoff rates and nonresponses with smartphone use compared to PC use (Couper et al., 2017; Keusch & Yan, 2017). For that matter, we expect the webform platform to be more conducive to comprehensive diary postings. However, bearing in mind that

most people often have their smartphones with them, the app platform is likely to invite more frequent postings.

Regarding the aspect of data relevance and RQ2, we examine whether the two platforms differ regarding their capacity for reaching out to participants with different socio-demographical profiles, including political out-groups. It is well-established that socio-demographical characteristics are politically relevant factors (Bergh, 2007); that is, voter behaviour, perceptions and attitudes are closely connected to the voter's gender, age, and education level. To get a variety of voters' perceptions, attitudes and thoughts on the election campaign, it is important that different groups are present in the samples, and that no groups are repelled from participation. Thus, presence of a variety of participant groups is the scientific quality criteria; not statistical representativeness of participants.

It is also well-established in studies of device effects that self-selection bias occurs when survey participants themselves can choose the response device. Participants preferring mobile devices rather than PCs are most often younger, just as more women and ethnic minorities tend to use smartphones (Antoun 2015, p. 114; Keusch & Yan, 2017, p. 751; Sommer et al., 2017, p. 378). Therefore, the concern is that data conducted through a specific, and only one, device might result in less diversity in voter profiles and consequently less diversity in perspectives. In this present study, the device was assigned to participants. Thus, we expect differences in participation consent rates among different types of participants and according to the platform offered to them. Furthermore, we expect the app platform more than the webform to encourage participation as its contemporaneity and flexibility make it possible for participants to post reflections on election campaign events and issues as they take place. Particularly, we expect this to be the case among groups who are usually less politically extroverted and visible – that is for example women, people with less education and people expressing less political interest. Thus, to determine whether the platforms lay down different conditions for such kind of diversity, we also compare the profiles of active participants who contributed with at least one posting.

Regarding personal involvement and RQ3, we examine whether the platforms can serve as personal diary instruments that lay down the conditions for and promote first-person reflections. That is, whether the participants indeed use the first-person pronoun “I” (implicitly or explicitly) or not when they write in the diary. Considering the literature on diaries as a genre (McNeill, 2003; Merry, 1979), it is clear that the personal and private form is essential in the conventional understanding of the written diary. The traditional diary is written in the first-person narrative that, versus a mere factual reporting of events, represents the narrator's personal or even intimate perceptions, ideas and experiences.

4. Election Diary: Design, Methods, and Data

The study – a pilot study under the NEDP – aimed to investigate the methodological conditions for catching how voters experienced and assessed the three-week election campaign that ensued before the local elections on 9 September 2019 by innovative digital platforms for qualitative diaries – an app and a webform.³ The digital platforms enabled voters to keep diary in a free-text format (open-ended diary) throughout the campaign period. Moreover, the platforms included quantitative questionnaires about participants' socio-demographic background, political interests, ideological self-identification (left-right scale), as well as their trust in political parties, politicians, and the media. One questionnaire⁴ was answered at the campaign's onset, and another was conducted after the Election Day. The current study of the methodological conditions for qualitative diary data are based on both the activity of postings and the answers to the initial quantitative questionnaire.⁵

Regarding the election diary, participants were asked to write about subjects based on their interests and what had attracted their attention during the campaign. However, to ensure accurate, valid data (Bryman, 2008, p. 226; Chatzitheochari et al., 2017), participants were offered project-related ideas and 'soft' instructions about relevant subjects:

- Political parties, politicians' behaviour and opinions
- Important election campaign topics
- Media coverage of campaign events
- Their political views
- What political party (s)he considers voting for and why

These soft instructions and information were provided in the recruitment letter and on the project's website, but not on the two digital platforms. Thus, in contrast to other qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, the diary method enables the participants to write what they want at any time during the election campaign period and without being directly and simultaneously primed by a researcher or research question. Another soft instruction was indeed the name of the project and how it was introduced to the participants as "My Election Diary". This name was

³ This project complies with the guidelines of the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH). The research team has notified the Data Protection Official for Research under the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) about all data collection that is in connection with the project.

⁴ This questionnaire also included a question of consent.

⁵ Due to internal communication problems with the app-developer (USIIT), app users did not get access to the final questionnaire until several days after the Election Day. Consequently, response rate is fairly low, but at the same level as for the webform (31% versus 30%). However, because of this it does not make sense to include detailed comparative analysis of this final phase. Besides, such an analyses would not contribute with much to the discussion of the three criteria "participant engagement", "data relevance" and "personal involvement".

intended to personalise the project and signal what genre of contribution (data) we were asking for: diary postings written by participants in their own words.

Two different digital platforms were developed⁶ for this study's data collection; that is an app for mobile devices (smartphone and tablet) and a webform that can be reached by different devices (PC, tablet as well as smartphone). All the information that was presented to the participants was the same on both digital platforms. Furthermore, both the app and the webform were named "Election Diary". During the election campaign, app participants who had permitted push notifications, received a reminder 24 hours after their last diary posting. Webform participants received an e-mail reminder with a link to the diary every third/fourth day. Finally, the designed app solution implemented a speech-to-text function, which prevented the exclusion of people to whom text-based communication does not come easy.

A simple random sample of 4,000 adults (18+) was selected by Statistics Norway from the National Electoral Register and combined with electronic contact information (e-mail address and mobile phone number) from the Norwegian Digitalisation Agency. The gross sample was then randomly split into two equalized groups (2*2,000): one group for the app and another group for the webform. As shown in Table 1, the sub-samples are similar with regard to gender and age.

Table 1 The total sample and the two sub-samples (gross sample). Column per cent.

		Total Sample	App Sample	Webform Sample
Gender	Male	50 %	50 %	51 %
	Female	50 %	50 %	49 %
Age	18-24	12 %	12 %	12 %
	25-44	39 %	39 %	38 %
	45-66	39 %	38 %	39 %
	67+	11 %	11 %	11 %
Total		100 %	100 %	100 %
N		4,000	2,000	2,000

The sample was recruited electronically by e-mail. Information about the project, including a link to its web page, privacy conditions, a link to the webform or the app

⁶ The Institute for Social Research signed a contract with USIT at the University of Oslo. USIT provides services and resources in the form of software, computational resources, storage services, access to data collections and advanced support for university research. The contract included both app development and support with regard to the webform. During the development period, there were several workshops and meetings between the research team and USIT to ensure the progress and quality of the app/webform.

(Google Play / App Store) and a unique passcode⁷ for login was provided in the e-mail. During recruiting (14–30 August 2019), several e-mails and text messages were sent to those who had not yet consented to participate in the project. Consent was a prerequisite to gaining access to and writing in the election diary. Thus, the first time the participant logged in to the app/webform using his or her unique passcode they first consented and then completed an initial questionnaire⁸, before accessing the diary. The app sample received immediate access, while the webform users received an e-mail with a link to the webform diary.

If compared to the ideal for representative large-scale surveys, a 9 % consent rate (Figure 1) may seem low. However, statistic representativeness was not the object, and low consent rate was expected. A large gross sample was chosen with the purpose of providing a qualitatively manageable number of voters who reflect a socio-demographically – and politically – varied set of profiles. Thus, the object is diversity, and the question to be examined is whether the two data collection instruments differ with regard to facilitating such an aim.

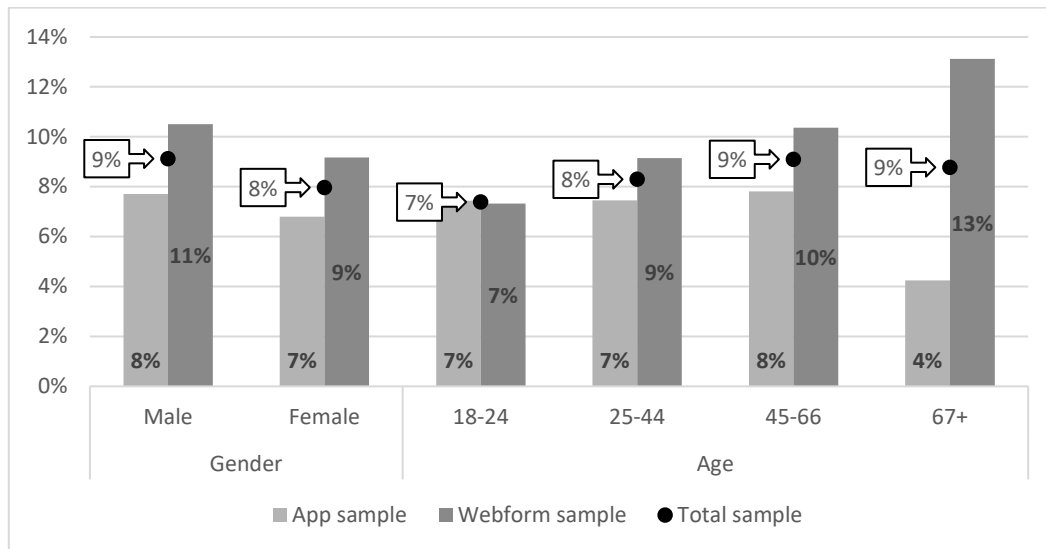
In the total sample of consenting participants, there is not much variation with regard to gender and age; that is, there is no major significant difference between men and women or between the age categories. This implies no systematic skewness between the gross and net samples. However, looking more specifically at the sub-samples, statistically significant more people gave consent to the web-form (10%) compared to the app (7%) ($p < .05$)⁹. Furthermore, age, in this regard, seemed to have mattered. The eldest group preferred the webform, whereas it did not matter for the youngest group whether they were recruited to use the app or the webform: the consent was identical (7%). For the two other age groups, the platform type made no significant difference.

⁷ The unique passcode «followed» the participant as an anonymous key in the data, which were directly transferred from the digital platforms to and stored at the Services for Sensitive Data (TSD) at the University of Oslo, Norway (<https://www.uio.no/english/services/it/research/sensitive-data/>, 17.03.2020).

⁸ To withdraw consent, the participant had to login to a specific webform from the project's webpage. This login was through the official ID-porten that is administered by the Norwegian Digitalisation Agency.

⁹ Here as well as in the following analysis, differences among groups are, conservatively, determined by comparing confidence intervals. Significance level: $p < 0.5$.

Figure 1 Consent rate for the two sub-samples and in total with regard to gender and age. Per cent.



See Table A in Appendix for details.

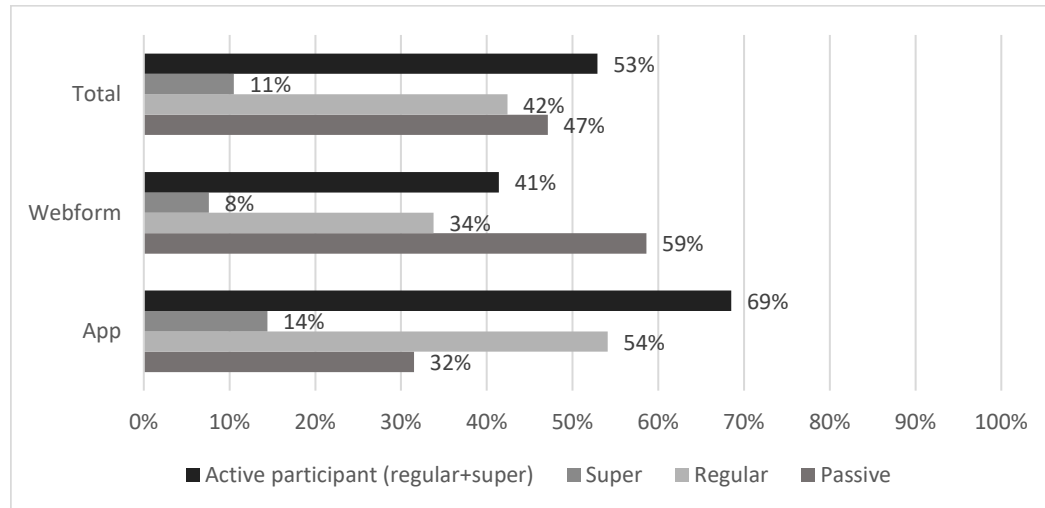
Regarding the significance of gender, both men and women preferred the web-form slightly over the app, but this difference was only significant for the male respondents ($p < .05$). Concerning both samples, the correlation between gender and consent overall is not statistically significant.

To conclude, neither of the two platforms repelled certain groups of respondents from consenting to participate. However, gender and age slightly mattered regarding consent, depending on the platform, as the webform seemed to appeal most to men and the oldest group whereas the app certainly had less appeal to the oldest group of respondents.

5. Results

Our point of departure for the analyses is that the quality of the diary data depends on participants' engagement, the data relevance and the format of involvement in diary postings. Therefore, we start with RQ1 about engagement by looking at diary contributions' frequency, number and length. We do this by distinguishing between three different participants (Figure 2): 1) Passive participants, who had made no posting; 2) Regular participants, who had made 1-6 postings; and 3) Super participants, who had made more than seven postings during the three-week election campaign. Active participants refers to the sum of the regular and super participants.

Figure 2 Different kinds of participants: passive, regular and super. Per cent.



N: total = 344; app = 146; webform = 198.

In total, the active participants constituted more than half of the respondents who consented to participate in this project, but the difference between the app and the webform is statistically significant ($p < .05$): 69% versus 41%. This implies that the app, in general terms, invited more engagement among participants who had consented to participate when it comes to diary postings' frequency and amount. Another way to illustrate the difference in the app's capacity to encourage engagement is the fact that there were almost twice as many passive participants on the webform platform compared to the app (59% versus 32%). This difference is also significant ($p < .05$). The difference may be a result of more frequent reminders to the app participants.¹⁰ However, whereas app participants had to give permission to push notifications with reminders, webform participants were not able to decline e-mail reminders. Second, the app participants only received reminders if they were passive; the webform participants received reminders independent of their activity.

Moreover, the app did not just encourage frequent participation. More participants kept diaries often and with a fairly high number of postings (at least seven) during the election campaign: 14% of the app participants, compared to 8% of the webform participants, are categorised as super participants. However, this difference is not statistically significant. As shown in Table 2, the highest number of postings written by a single participant was 44 on the app platform and 16 on the webform.

¹⁰ Unfortunately, metadata do not show whether the participants gave permission to push notifications with reminders.

Table 2 Key information about the diary postings.

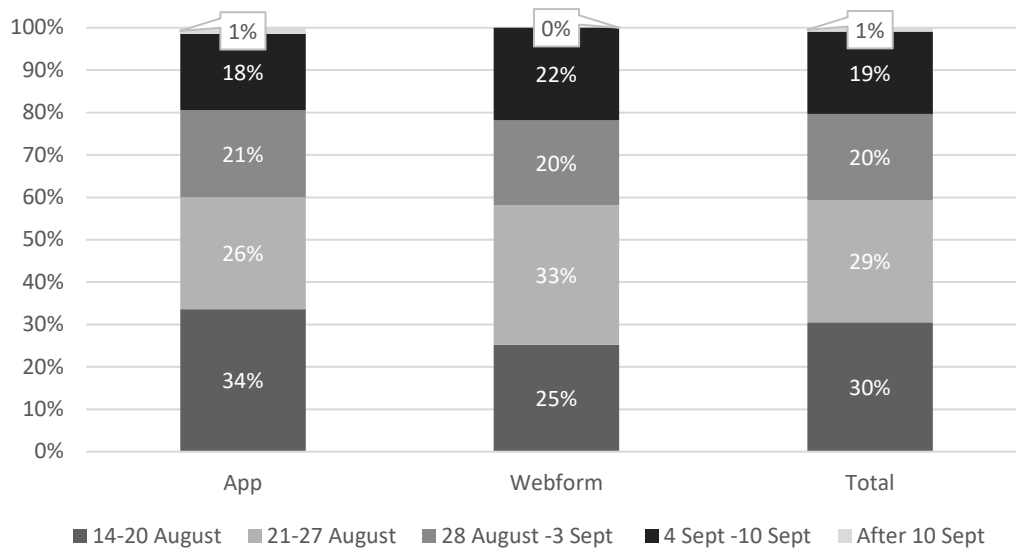
	App	Webform	Total
Number of participants	146	198	344
Number of active participants	100	82	182
Number of postings	541 (63%)	325 (37%)	866 (100%)
Maximum number of posts	44	16	44
Average number of posts (among active participants)	5.4	4.0	4.8
Median number of postings (among active participants)	3	3	3
Word count	32,373 (51%)	31,233 (49%)	63,606 (100%)
Average word/posting (among active participants)	59.8	96.1	73.4
Average word (among active participants)	323.7	380.9	349.5
Maximum number of words per posting	722	633	722
<i>Share of postings with...</i>			
...1-50 words	55%	41%	50%
...51-100 words	31%	24%	28%
...101-150 words	8%	16%	11%
...151+ words	6%	19%	11%
Character*/active participant (on average)	1,531.8	1,825.0	1,663.9
Character*/posting (on average)	283.1	460.5	349.7

Table 2 shows more details about the postings with regard to the number and length, which are also relevant for the quality of data. Firstly, 866 postings were collected in total – 63% through the app and 37% from the webform; and each active app participant has on average written 5.4 postings whereas the average number is 4.0 among webform participants. In both samples, we find deviation among participants. The median being lower than the average, indicates that a certain part of participants has written some more posts, pulling up the average. This is particularly the case for the app. However, the median number of postings is identical on the app and webform: 3 postings.

This may be interpreted as an illustration of the app being more suitable for diary data collection in the sense of promoting engagement. However, the picture is more nuanced. Looking at the total length of the postings (number of words), the difference between the two devices seems not so convincing: 51% of all words collected in the Election Diary Project are written by app participants; 49% by the participants on the webform platform. In fact, on average, active participants on the webform platform write more words in total (381) and per posting (96) than the active participants on the app platform do (324 / 60 words respectively). Thus, whereas app participants write more frequently, webform participants write more comprehensive diary postings.

Finally, participant engagement has a time dimension. Figure 3 shows the level of engagement during election campaign, and overall, participation tend to go down as the campaign passes.

Figure 2 Share of postings every week during the election campaign, by digital platforms. Per cent



N: total = 866; app = 541; webform = 325.

A significantly larger share of diary postings on app is posted within the first week of the election campaign ($p < .05$), after which postings decrease gradually. The largest share of postings on webform is posted in the second week of the campaign, which is significantly higher than the remaining weeks. Comparing the two platforms, engagement appears more consistent on the webform, however, comparing the last two weeks of the campaign, app participants are not significantly less engaged.

Data quality is, however, not only dependent on engagement but also on the data relevance (RQ2). To shed light on this aspect of conditions for data quality related to voter behaviour and perceptions, we first look at the diversity of active participant profiles – the persons who write the diary postings – as an indication of whether different political attitudes are present in the diary data (Table 3). As mentioned, previous research states that socio-demographic characteristics – gender, age, and education – are assumed to be politically relevant factors. Furthermore, we also include political interest and ideological self-identification on a left-right scale (0-10 rating scale), as such political profile factors may affect reflections on election campaigns and politics expressed through the diary postings.

Table 3 Participant profile of passive and active participants*. Per cent

		App		Webform	
		Active	Passive	Active	Passive
Gender	Male	55 %	51 %	55 %	54 %
	Female	45 %	49 %	45 %	46 %
Age	18-24	8 %	20 %	5 %	11 %
	25-44	39 %	46 %	22 %	46 %
	45-66	44 %	35 %	51 %	34 %
	67+	9 %	0 %	22 %	9 %
Education	Low	2 %	7 %	4 %	4 %
	Middle	28 %	36 %	22 %	39 %
	High	70 %	58 %	74 %	57 %
Self- Identification Left-Right scale	Left (0-3)	29 %	41 %	30 %	23 %
	Middle (4-6)	39 %	33 %	44 %	42 %
	Right (7-10)	32 %	26 %	26 %	34 %
Political Interest	Not at all interested	3 %	2 %	0 %	2 %
	Not much interested	18 %	38 %	17 %	29 %
	Somewhat interested	56 %	51 %	55 %	62 %
	Very interested	23 %	9 %	28 %	8 %
	Total	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
	N	99-100	45-46	82	114-116

*Active participants: those who have written at least once in the diary.

Starting with the socio-demographic profiles of the active participants, the overall pattern is identical between the two platforms: a few more men than women, most highly educated people, and quite a few participants with low education. Significantly more participants on the app are medium educated compared to the web-form ($p < .05$), but differences are rather small.

Concerning age profile, however, the pattern differs between the platforms. Whereas the oldest and the youngest group of participants are present at the same (low) level on the app (8–9%), the oldest group constitutes 22% of the active participants on the webform, which is the same level as the group of 25–44-year-olds. The middle-aged, for both platforms, are most present.

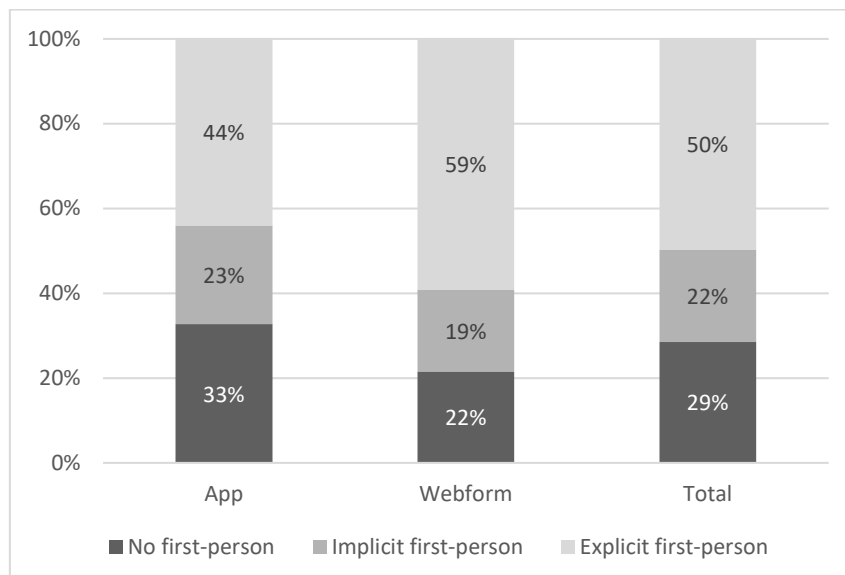
Looking at the socio-demographic profiles of active versus passive participants, we note the same pattern on the app and webform: men, the two oldest age groups, and highly educated people are more present among the active participants compared to the passive participants. In particular, it is notable that all app participants in the 67+ age group are classified as active, whereas this is not the case with the webform platform. This implies that despite the difficulty of recruiting elderly people to the app platform, it is not hard to motivate them to use the app for diary keeping.

Participants' political profile patterns are also significantly alike across the platforms. More app participants place themselves ideologically to the right than webform participants, but the difference is not statistically significant. Not surprisingly, most active participants in the total sample are interested in politics. Consequently, less politically interested people are in minority. None of the webform participants regards themselves uninterested in politics, but the app platform has managed to draw in some. However, the difference between the app and the web-form is small and insignificant.

Results only partly confirm our expectation that due to the possibility of contemporaneity the app may promote more diversity and variation by encouraging political out-groups - the young, women, people with less education, and those with minimal political interest - to keep diaries, compared to the webform. The expectation seems to just be valid for younger people and to some extent for those with less political interest. Thus, differences in data relevance between the app and the webform are limited. However, both the app and the webform include active participants with different socio-demographic and political profiles which is assumed to be a precondition for variation in the perspectives present in the diary data.

Regarding data quality, another aspect is to what extent the data are affected by the diary format that the two instruments for data collection intend to facilitate: that is, the personal involvement and reflection of the individual participant. Proceeding with RQ3, we compare the prevalence of first-person narration in the diary postings on the two platforms.

Figure 3 Use of the first-person in diary postings. Per cent.

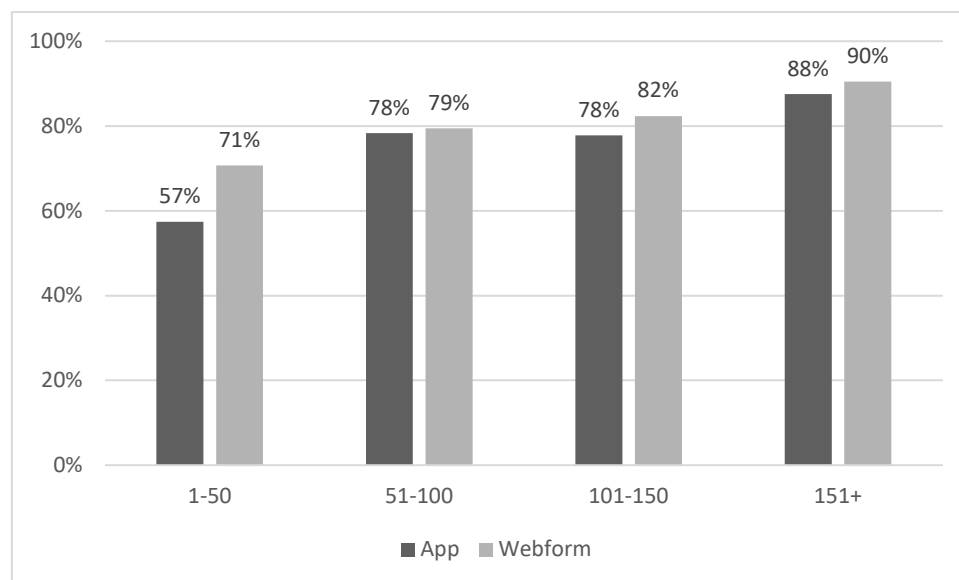


See Table B in Appendix for details.

Figure 4 shows the percentages of postings that have no 'first-person' term, and the number of postings that explicitly use the first-person term ('I') or implicitly, as has

become more usual in the Norwegian written language. That is, “I” is not written but is tacitly understood in the sentence. Half of the 866 postings disseminate the thoughts and views of an explicit first-person narrator. If we include postings that use the implicit “I”, the share is 72%. As expected, the first-person posting, especially the explicit one, compared to the app, is more widespread on the webform. The share of explicit first-person narratives is significantly different between the app and the webform ($p < .05$), which is not the case for the implicit one. Consequently, postings disseminating a mere factual report without relating this to the participant’s subjective perspective and stance were significantly more widespread ($p < .05$) among the app postings compared to the webform postings (33% vs 22%). At first glance, it may therefore look as if the first-person narrative is, to some extent, correlated with the platform being used; however, as shown in Figure 5, this apparent correlation may have been caused by the postings’ length.

Figure 4 Use of the first person (implicit and explicit) in diary postings with a different number of words. Per cent



See Table C in Appendix for details.

In general, first-person narratives are most widespread among the longest postings and less among the shortest but still very common: 61% of all postings with less than 51 words include a first-person narrator (Table C in Appendix). The only significant difference ($p < .05$) between the app and the webform with regard to first-person narratives is among the shortest postings (57% vs 71%). This indicates that both platforms support the diary genre and facilitate personal involvement by encouraging the participants to disseminate their thoughts and views. What mattered most was not the platform type but rather the number of words that the participant used in a posting. The significance of the type of platform disappears when the number of words is more than 50.

6. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The qualitative diary method may provide a unique opportunity to get first-hand access to voters' reflections and perceptions that are formulated in their own words and at the time they find appropriate. In that way qualitative diary data is a valuable source of information in itself, but not least as a supplement to quantitative survey data, which traditionally have been the main source of information within the research field of voter behaviour and elections. Contrary to most data collection methods, diary data are not equally subject to time, space, or content, which may be valuable for research in political science and, in particular, election and campaign studies. Yet, research challenges are related to supporting and laying down the methodological conditions for the diary genre and data quality by encouraging prolonged participant engagement and personal involvement in the postings as well as to ensure data relevance by including participants with different social and political profiles.

Against the backdrop of these criteria, this article demonstrates that innovative digital platforms - an app and a webform - may be suitable instruments for collection of such diary data. However, we also find that the two platforms differ slightly as regards to the ability to draw in and maintain participants' engagement.

To start with the dimension of participant engagement involving consent, we found consent rate to be slightly higher on the webform than the app. Thus, getting participants to download an app compared to opening a link in an e-mail appears to be a little bit higher threshold. However, this is mainly the case among the eldest age group, who significantly preferred the webform over app. Thus, when applying digital platforms for data collection, one should bear in mind that even among populations in the vanguard of the global information society, as it is the case in Norway, we should not ignore the question of digital divides. A divide as to internet access is not a concern, but a second-level digital divide (Hargittai, 2002) addressing the question of a divide in digital skills and familiarity with different devices, is pertinent. Therefore, if further projects only use the app and aim at voters' demographic representation, oversampling elderly people may be a way of accomplishing this. However, whereas the app tends to discourage the elderly, as to consenting to the project, it does not discourage them from participating actively when first consent is given.

The socio-demographic and political profiles of active participants on the two platforms only differ slightly. One difference is found as regards to age, where the eldest group are significantly more present on the webform than on the app. However, what is also interesting in light of the research field of voter behaviour and election campaign, is that we found a slightly higher participation among certain political outgroups – young and less political interested people – on the app compared to the webform. This gives some support for the assumption that the app encourage participation among groups who are usually less politically engaged. Nevertheless, differences between the platforms are limited and our results do not indicate that the

platforms may engage different types of participants and, consequently, resulting in different conditions for collecting qualitative diary data. Rather, as regards data relevance and the aim to collect an abundance of perceptions through diary postings, we found that both platforms were able to engage a socio-demographically diverse group of participants with different ideological positions and political interest.

As to the dimension of participant engagement involving number and length of diary postings, we found minor differences across the platforms. As expected, webform participants are likely to write fewer, but longer diary postings, whereas app participants are likely to write more postings, but of shorter length. Perhaps this result may be prompted by the frequent notifications with reminders to app participants. Yet, it seems reasonable to assume that the format of the app, due to smaller screen size of the mobile devices it is reached from (smartphone and tablet), and because these devices are normally applied for short texts or posts, and used on the go, simply invites to shorter “status updates” (Lambert & Miller, 2015, p. 173-174). On one hand, this might be at the expense of longer and (perhaps) more detailed reflections, which is the aim of qualitative diary method. On the other, the frequent use of the app supports the overall intention of gaining information about subjective perceptions of social phenomena and their contextual setting, as they take place. In this case election campaign. This indicates that the platforms each might suit a different aim.

The above inevitably raises the question of differences in diary content. Does the app to a lesser degree form the basis of privacy, intimacy, and personal reflections, which is considered the methodological strength of the diary method (cf. McNeill 2003)? Here, results indicate that both platforms support the diary genre by encouraging participants’ personal involvement through first-person narratives and reflections. Both on app and webform, the majority of postings include the first-person term “I”, explicitly or implicitly. Yet, comparing the platforms we found that app postings are less likely to include first-person narratives. But the difference is only found among the shortest postings (1-50 words) and even among those, 57 % of postings on app explicitly or implicitly include the first term. Among webform postings, the number is 71 %. Furthermore, and perhaps more important is that how the different devices are used may be affected by different cultures and norms, for instance norms for how to express oneself by words, but it may also be a practical issue. Some devices invite to long sentences and many words while other invite to short and grammatically incomplete texts. However, this does not automatically imply difference in the quality of data, because we - as writers - have an ability to adapt to the prevailing norms and framework.

Overall, on both platforms the group of active participants came across as committed and engaged: The number of postings, their frequency, and the length of the contribution delivered by active participants are indeed impressive. The same applies to participants’ persistence. As demonstrated, participants all together kept a rather

consistent level of postings during the election campaign. Especially on the webform. The slight decrease in postings during campaign, we found, may have both methodological and substantive reasons. Methodologically, the research project may not have been able to maintain the interest of the participants, or they considered the participation to be too burdensome. Substantively, participants may have become tired of the election campaign, have nothing more to put across, or perhaps they have made up their mind and voted and therefore, the campaign is no more of relevance. We believe that such substantive reasons related to real world facts are important to take into account when assessing the use of data collection instruments in a real-life setting.

To conclude, this article shows that both an app and a web form may function as instruments for collection of qualitative diary data within the field of political science. Strong support for one of the platforms being better suited than the other is, however, not found. We find no indications that 'the burden of the diary method'—long-term commitment and persistence to reflect and to put these re-flections into words—has affected participants when participation in the project is first accepted. On the contrary. As demonstrated, diary postings on both platforms are equally distributed across the election campaign. Thus, both the web-form and the app serve as diary data collection instruments.

Finally, we should address the question: What is the qualitative diary method good for and what is its contribution? We argue that the qualitative diary method can stand on its own leg, but in particular serve as a supplement to established methods in the field of political science in order to move forward in understanding voter behaviour and perceptions. An understanding that until today primary has been based on the logic of quantitative methodology and closed-ended questions. As regards to political science, engaged in political behaviour, diaries could provide thorough insight into how voters in their own words perceive political campaigns, and could reveal how accounts of specific campaign events, issues and actors are evaluated and applied in order to substantiate their final decision about party choice. That would allow for us to gain first-hand information and knowledge on the mechanisms behind voter behaviour and how such causal mechanisms are related to both context factors and the individual voter's reflection on these.

However, it may be argued that a shortcoming of the qualitative diary method is it may work best for engaged voters and consequently lack of representativity. We do understand the argument, but we do not agree it is a problem for the research per se. To what extent it is a problem will depend on the research questions and to what and whom the conclusions are generalised to. Indeed, to study the engaged and political interested – but diverse – voters may be of great value in itself and contributes to in-depth knowledge about causal mechanisms which are hard to uncover otherwise.

Further, engaging participants in empirical research projects is an ongoing challenge today and as data quality relies on the ability to encourage exerted involvement among participants, research should search for new instruments for data collection supporting that. As pointed out and explored in this article, the qualitative diary based on digital platforms may be such a tool. We argue that accommodating participants is an important research obligation and a condition for relevant and valid empirical research. The fact that, along with the digitalisation of society, our language and ways of communicating have changed, should therefore also encourage researchers to revise and extend the repertoire of data collection instruments and how research interact with its respondents. The digital diary based on technology familiar to people may be a step in that direction.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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Appendix

Table A Consent rate for the two sub-samples in total with regard to gender and age. Per cent.

		Total Sample	App Sample	Webform Sample	N: Total Sample	N: App Sample	N: Webform Sample
Gender	Male	9 %	8 %	11 %	2,017	999	1,018
	Female	8 %	7 %	9 %	1,983	1,001	982
Age	18-24	7 %	7 %	7 %	474	242	232
	25-44	8 %	7 %	9 %	1,543	778	765
	45-66	9 %	8 %	10 %	1,550	768	782
	67+	9 %	4 %	13 %	433	212	221
<i>Total</i>		9 %	7 %	10 %	4,000	2,000	2,000

Table B The use of first-person in diary postings. Per cent.

	App	Webform	Total
No First-Person	33 %	22 %	29 %
Implicit First-Person	23 %	19 %	22 %
Explicit First-Person	44 %	59 %	50 %
<i>Total</i>	100 %	100 %	100 %
<i>N</i>	541	325	866

Table C The use of first-person (implicit and explicit) in diary postings with a different number of words. Per cent

		Number of Words				Total
		1-50	51-100	101-150	151+	
App	No first-person	43 %	22 %	22 %	13 %	33 %
	First-person ^a	5 %	78 %	78 %	88 %	67 %
	<i>Total</i>	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
	<i>N</i>	298	166	45	32	541
Webform	No first-person	29 %	21 %	18 %	10 %	22 %
	First-person ^a	71 %	79 %	82 %	90 %	78 %
	<i>Total</i>	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
	<i>N</i>	133	78	51	63	325
Total	No first-person	39 %	21 %	20 %	11 %	29 %
	First-person ^a	61 %	79 %	80 %	89 %	71 %
	<i>Total</i>	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %
	<i>N</i>	431	244	96	95	866

^aThe category includes both implicit and explicit first person.