Analyzing political TikToks with Vision Language Models

Teamproject WS 2026

UNIVERSITY OF MANNHEIM

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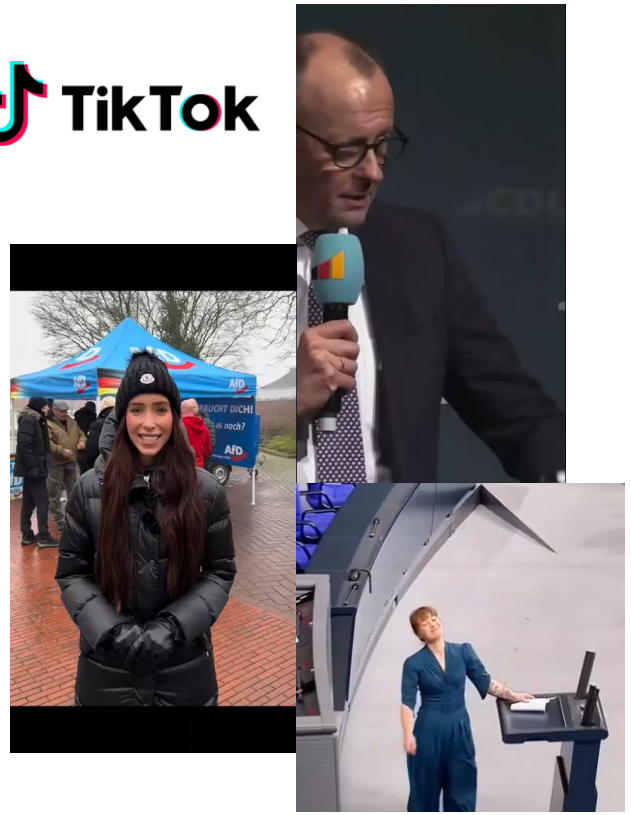
Background

- **TikTok** has become a major platform for **political communication, persuasion and propaganda** *(Medina Serrano et al.)*
- The **sheer volume** of vidoes makes manual analysis **difficult** *(Xu & Zhang, 2017)*
- **Vision Language Models** (VLMs) could make analysis scalable
- **But do they actually understand political content?**



Video Links:
https://www.tiktok.com/@merzcdu/video/7464257858725530902
https://www.tiktok.com/@afd_landkreis_stade/video/7469091829791591702
https://www.tiktok.com/@lov4ru/video/7474323009818348822
(These are randomly chosen from the top 50 posts on https://www.tiktok.com/tag/bundestagswahl25 and do not reflect personal views or views of the Universtiy of Mannheim)

Can open-weight VLMs reliably annotate and fact-check political TikTok videos at scale?

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- RQ1: Are VLMs **reliable annotators**?
  - Evaluate on **expert-annotated datasets** such as PoliTok-DE
  - Compare VLM annotations with labels from political experts
  - How well do model annotations align with expert judgements?
- RQ2: Can VLMs support **automated fact-checking**?
  - Can VLMs identify **propaganda or misleading political content**?
  - Can they identify **specific false or misleading claims**?
  - Can they provide **accurate corrections or supporting evidence**?
- Using proprietary VLMs, such as GPT/Claude at scale is costly

  → We will use local models with open weights, such as Qwen or Gemma

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- Responsible person: Maximilian Kreutner
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- Language: English or German
- Duration: 6 Months
- Min/max number of participants: 3-5
- Prerequisites: Programming skills in python
- Applicable to MMDS: Yes
- Online: Possible, but in person preferred