

THE POLITICS OF EUROVISION: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM'S 2021 AND 2022 PARTICIPATIONS AS EXPRESSED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract: *In recent years, the opinion that the Eurovision Song Contest has become highly politicised is prevalent in the media and the popular voice, although not much research exists that can attest to this claim. In this work we conduct a case study that applies sentiment and discourse analysis methodologies to the assessment of political opinions in social media regarding this artistic and social event. The main objective is to explore to what extent and in what form this supposed politicisation has an expression on Twitter, as illustrated by the cases of artists Sam Ryder and James Newman, the United Kingdom's representatives in the 2022 and 2021 editions of the contest, respectively. We examine references to two historical-political contexts that have had a severe impact on the European society over the last few years, and which have determined, among many other social aspects, the reception of Eurovision results since they took place: Brexit and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.*

Key words: *Eurovision, Twitter, social media, politics, sentiment analysis, discourse analysis.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Eurovision Song Contest, an international songwriting competition, has garnered attention as a show whose latest edition, held from May 10 until May 14, 2022, was followed by more than 161 million viewers worldwide (Eurovision Press Office, 2022). To put it briefly, the main aim of the contest is to find Europe's most popular song. To do so, participants perform an original song, and spectators vote for their favourite one from home. The dynamics surrounding the contest, however, have changed a lot since its inception in 1956, when it was up to a series of professional panels appointed by each country to decide the winner of the contest. Nowadays, the popular voice is also considered, as viewers go well beyond their role as voters and engage with the contest through social media platforms, where they can voice their feelings towards the contestants and their songs. In this way, the emergence of social media platforms has contributed to changing the role of viewers from mere spectators to actors, since they are expected not only to vote, but also to actively voice their feelings towards the representatives and their songs through these platforms (Segijn et al., 2019).

Of these networks, Twitter probably stands out as the most relevant, as it provides users with a space for anonymous, communal, accessible, unmediated, and live communication (Highfield et al., 2013; Voorveld et al., 2018). Within the context of Eurovision, Twitter is now even considered an official extension of the event, as there are official hashtags and accounts that publish comments in real time regarding what is being televised. Via these official hashtags, viewers practice what is known as connected co-viewing (Pires & Roig, 2020): they express, in up to 280 characters, their own opinions, and simultaneously engage with others' comments about the performances they are watching, thus creating what Halliwell (2018:113) defines as "like-minded transnational networks".

From a linguistic perspective, the analysis of the discourse contained in tweets is undoubtedly valuable, as these messages are largely based on the verbalisation of emotions and ideas (Kouloumpis et al., 2011). Furthermore, Twitter users constitute a very rich sample, and the massive amount of available data is not only free, but also public and easily accessible (Mora-Cantalops & Sánchez-Alonso, 2019). As has been mentioned previously, Twitter allows users to remain anonymous, and, consequently, their tweets are very often extremely polarised in terms of sentiment. In other words, they can express their most extreme ideas without fear of being identified. In relation to Eurovision, Twitter users often go beyond stating their musical tastes and include references to socio-historical events with evaluations of the musical quality of the songs, the performances of the representatives, or

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the results obtained by each country. In this sense, it is not unusual to find allusions to politics since it is widely believed that the contest is biased, and countries are often accused of bloc voting according to political interests (Charron, 2013; Stockemer et al., 2018).

Sentiment analysis is a Natural Language Processing (NLP) task that focuses on the identification and extraction of people's opinions and perceptions towards entities (which can be individuals but also products, events, topics, etc.) and their attributes (Liu, 2015). Its basic tasks, according to Cambria et al. (2017), are polarity detection and emotion recognition, which are usually implemented as classification tasks. Bearing this in mind, it is only logical that Eurovision tweets are valuable for their study from the perspective of sentiment analysis.

In the present work we conduct a case study that applies sentiment and discourse analysis methodologies to the assessment of political opinions on social media regarding a highly politicised topic such as Eurovision. More specifically, this work focuses on the political discourse that surrounds the opinions expressed regarding the United Kingdom's representatives at Eurovision 2021 and 2022 (i.e., James Newman and Sam Ryder) on Twitter. Newman finished the contest in the last position, and his failure to enter the top 5 was blamed on Brexit. Ryder, in turn, finished in the second position, while Ukraine (represented by the Kalush Orchestra) won the contest. Nonetheless, it was widely debated whether such results were a consequence of the sympathy vote due to the Russo-Ukrainian War that has been ongoing since February 2022, and many argued that the United Kingdom was the rightful winner (Adejobi, 2022).

Although it is generally recognised that politicisation is present in Eurovision and there is some research that confirms this claim (e.g., Fenn et al., 2006), we are not aware of studies that approach this topic from a sentiment and discourse analysis perspective. In this work, we seek to provide evidence to back the well-known claim that the Eurovision song contest is politicised by analysing user-generated content on social networks employing such methods. Our data and analysis do confirm previous results, but they also suggest that the audience places considerable importance on the artistic merit of artists.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Evaluative language

Opinions influence our behaviour, since our beliefs are partly based on how others view the world. As reported by Chen et al. (2022), consumers pay specific attention to negative reviews before making a purchase decision. Most of these opinions are expressed through linguistic expressions, usually referred to as evaluative language (Benamara et al., 2017). The study of this discipline has attracted researchers from various areas, including linguistics, philosophy, and sociology, and has given rise to new fields of study, such as affective computing (Cambria et al., 2017).

Sentiment analysis is thus concerned with the study of evaluative language. As explained by Liu (2011), its rise can be linked to the growth of social media use. As the amount of opinion-carrying data has increased thanks to platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, so has research on opinion mining because individuals and organisations employ that data to make decisions and to measure customer satisfaction (Liu, 2015). Consequently, the application of sentiment analysis has spread to other domains such as consumer products, financial services, healthcare, and even political elections (Moreno-Ortiz et al., 2019).

Sentiment analysis tools and techniques can be classified into three categories: machine learning, lexicon-based, or a combination of both. In the case of the machine-learning approach, it uses a set of features which are learned from annotated corpora or labelled examples. The lexicon-based approach, on the other hand, uses a lexicon to provide the polarity for each word or phrase found in the text.

The main goal of sentiment analysis is to automatically classify the semantic orientation that language users express. On the other hand, aspect-based sentiment analysis attempts to achieve a deeper understanding of language by finding the specific phrase-level utterances where evaluative language is used as well as the aspects of the entities those utterances refer to (Moreno-Ortiz et al., 2019).

2.2. Eurovision

Co-viewing is a concept that refers to a group of people discussing media content in the same physical space (Pittman & Tefertiller, 2015; Pires, 2018). This concept, however, has undergone some transformations, as nowadays it is possible to find terms such as "connected co-viewing", used to refer to the practice of watching "audiovisual content with (accompanied by) and within (inside) a connected platform, apps and second-screen devices" (Pires & Roig, 2020:84). In other words, activities such as watching television while commenting on what

is being televised through social media platforms have now come to be considered a version of co-viewing. As reported by Cohen and Lancaster (2014), in doing so, viewers can reach other unknown audience members who share similar tastes and interests.

According to Muntinga et al. (2011), consumer engagement behaviour can be divided into three categories: (i) consuming, based on simply watching TV; (ii) contributing, whereby viewers put comments on social media based on what they are watching; and (iii) creating, when consumers post their own reviews of what they have watched. In this sense, it is possible to distinguish between passive and active types of behaviours, consuming being the first category, and contributing and creating constituting the second one. Such active engagement behaviours, as suggested by Segijn et al. (2019), create deeper and more personally relevant experiences, and require a higher emotional and cognitive type of consumer investment.

Of all the available social media platforms, Twitter has become quite popular, and it is particularly useful for this practice as it provides users with a common space where they can share their thoughts in real time (Voorveld et al., 2018). Tweeting does not only engage viewers with the consumed content, but it also enhances their experience (Weisz et al., 2007) and leads to an increase in programme involvement (Segijn et al., 2017). Unlike other networks (e.g., Facebook or Instagram), Twitter makes it easier for viewers to start or follow discussions that are already in progress, since they can have instantaneous access to these through hashtags (Marwick & boyd, 2011). As a consequence, television is now viewed as part of a network of interconnected devices, where Twitter plays a key role in its transformation into a social type of television (Tuomi & Bachmayer, 2011; Tuomi, 2012).

Eurovision sparks “a broader social climate of participation” (Pires & Roig, 2020:81). Its competitive factor, as well as the extravagance of the performances that the participating countries put together, make viewers feel engaged. Eurovision is believed to foster and celebrate diversity in many forms, but mainly culturally and linguistically (representatives can sing in their native languages), and this diversity is reflected in its international fan base (Halliwell, 2018). The format of the contest, based on a voting system that partially grants viewers the possibility to choose the winner, also stimulates their participation through their votes. But the contest also expects viewers to participate by sharing their thoughts and opinions, and therefore, official Twitter hashtags and accounts are set up and used throughout the live emission of the contest and users are encouraged to follow them (Highfield et al., 2013).

Tweets on Eurovision have been the focus of previous research. Tuomi (2012) explored how Twitter is used, among others, by Eurovision fans (also known as *euroman*s) and reached the conclusion that social media platforms such as Twitter can be a good complement to older technology such as text-TV. Highfield et al. (2013) investigated the use of Twitter for the expression of shared fandom in the context of Eurovision, and confirmed that it facilitates the connection between fans around the world.

Sentiment analysis has also been used previously in relation to Eurovision tweets. Demergis (2019) first attempted to predict Eurovision results through the study of the sentiment expressed in tweets. Kumpulainen et al. (2020) explored the prediction of the contest's televoting results using a naïve Bayes classifier for sentiment analysis, while Stieglitz et al. (2020) examined the relationship between the Eurovision audience voting and predictors based on quantity and emotions, and compared the results of using data from before and after the contest.

2.2.1. *The United Kingdom in Eurovision*

The U.K. has participated in Eurovision since its inception. It is part of the “Big Five”, a group of five countries (alongside France, Italy, Spain, and Germany) that are automatically qualified for the final every year, as they are the main financial contributors to the contest. The U.K.'s early years were marked by success, with victories achieved by Sandie Shaw's “Puppet on a String” (1967), Lulu's “Boom Bang-a-Bang” (1969), Brotherhood of Man's “Save Your Kisses for Me” (1976), Bucks Fizz's “Making Your Mind Up” (1981), and Katrina and the Waves' “Love Shine a Light” (1997). Nonetheless, the turn of the century brought about a challenging period for the U.K. in Eurovision, as the country began to face difficulties in entering the top 10, a tendency only broken three times since 2000: in 2002 by Jessica Garlick (2 position), in 2009 by Jade Ewen (5 position), and in 2022 by Sam Ryder (2 position).

This has led to discussions and debates about the factors contributing to the U.K.'s performance in the contest throughout the years, including the impact of politics. For instance, as noted by Wellings et al. (2019), the U.K.'s null points in 2003 were viewed as a consequence of the invasion of Iraq, with headlines going as far as to state “U.K. humiliated in Eurovision ‘post-Iraq backlash’” (Begley, 2003). Moreover, relations between nations and the subsequent existence of voting blocs have been confirmed: Yair (1995) identified the existence of three voting blocs (Western, Mediterranean, and Northern Europe), while Gatherer (2003) added the “Warsaw Pact” (Romania, Russia, and the former Yugoslavia) and the “Viking Empire”, formed by Scandinavian and Baltic countries. Fenn et al. (2006) also confirmed the existence of voting patterns based on political relationships or affected by political events.

This situation has led to the contest becoming an ordeal to watch for Britons, as stated by Highfield et al. (2013:320), who concluded that the country “had increasingly less chance of winning due to the perceived presence of political or bloc voting among other Eurovision nations, regardless of the quality of the songs”. In this sense, Sam Ryder represents the U.K.’s latest chance to win Eurovision in almost 15 years, hence the emotional build-up of his participation. Moreover, this was heightened by the fact that the previous year’s contestant, James Newman, scored zero points.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Objectives and methods

The main objective is to find out how and to what extent this supposed politicisation of Eurovision has an expression on social media. We use the cases of Sam Ryder and James Newman, the United Kingdom’s representatives on the 2022 and 2021 edition of the contest, respectively. This objective involves several operational prerequisites that determine the following specific objectives.

- Specific objective 1: to identify the semantic orientation of tweets regarding Sam Ryder’s and James Newman’s participation in Eurovision.
- Specific objective 2: to gauge the actual degree of politicisation expressed by Twitter users concerning Eurovision.
- Specific objective 3: to gain insights into the political discourse contained in these tweets.

We use a mixed-methods approach. For specific objective 1, we employ a sentiment analysis classifier on a large sample of tweets and then complement it with qualitative discourse analysis and lexical analysis techniques. *Lingmotif 2.0* (Moreno-Ortiz, 2023), a multilingual, multi-platform, lexicon-based sentiment analysis tool that can be used with general language and domain-specific texts. *Lingmotif* determines the semantic orientation of a text by detecting sentiment-laden linguistic expressions using a comprehensive sentiment lexicon, and also implements a comprehensive set of sentiment shifters that account for context-dependent modifications of the valence of a word (e.g., the word “excellent” has a positive polarity, but when preceded by “far from”, it has a negative polarity). For specific objective 2, we perform a manual classification of a smaller random sample of tweets with three annotators and calculating inter-annotator agreement, a process that is described in section 3.3 below. Finally, for specific objective 3, we carry out a corpus-based, qualitative discourse analysis of a purposive sample; for this we make extensive use of the Keywords and Concordance tools in *SketchEngine* (Kilgarriff et al., 2014). We examine references to two historical-political contexts that have had a severe impact on European society over the last few years, and which have determined, among many other social aspects, the reception of Eurovision results ever since they took place. On the one hand, we review mentions of Brexit, i.e., the withdrawal of the U.K. from the European Union, which took place on January 31, 2020. On the other hand, we pay attention to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began on February 24.

3.2. Corpus

To accomplish the aforementioned objectives, we compiled a corpus of tweets ($n = 17,146$) on the participation of Sam Ryder in the 2022 Eurovision Song Contest, who finished in the second position. This dataset was created using the *snsrape* Python library, using the keyword “Sam Ryder” and the hashtags #Eurovision, #Eurovision2022, and #ESC2022. We downloaded tweets produced between May 10 and May 14, 2022. This was done to cover public opinion throughout the whole contest process, including the semi-finals and the final.

To determine the impact of politicisation in Ryder’s corpus, we decided to compile a second, smaller corpus of tweets ($n = 4,425$) on James Newman’s participation in the 2021 Eurovision Song Contest as the U.K. representative, who finished in the last position with zero points. This allowed us to compare the number of political references in Ryder’s corpus with that in Newman’s, and it also helped us to determine whether the final position obtained had an influence on the semantic orientation of people’s opinions online. This second corpus only included tweets produced between May 18 and May 22, 2021, using the keyword “James Newman” and the hashtags #Eurovision, #Eurovision2021, or #ESC2021.

The tweets from both datasets were then cleaned and pre-processed to remove hyperlinks, line breaks, and all irrelevant metadata. In addition, they were randomised to prevent their accumulation on the same date. The corpus was subsequently analysed employing quantitative and qualitative corpus analysis techniques. The total number of tweets and words in each dataset is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Total number of tweets and words in each dataset.

Artist	Time frame	Tweets	Words
Sam Ryder	2022	17 146	381 305
James Newman	2021	4425	107 278

3.3. Annotation process

In order to obtain the proportion of tweets that contain references to politics, we carried out an annotation process on a sample of 1,000 tweets (500 for each artist), which gives us a confidence level of 97%. Annotation was carried out using Prodigy (Montani et al., 2021), a tool specifically developed for the annotation of corpora for machine learning tasks. In order to avoid annotator bias, three coders trained in linguistic annotation were asked to perform a single classification task: labelling the tweets as discussing politics or not discussing politics. Although this may appear to be a rather straightforward task, the truth is that we did find some examples that lend themselves to interpretation, such as (1) and (2), where users refer to Europe not liking the United Kingdom without explicitly mentioning a political motive (e.g., Brexit). In these cases, it was decided to follow the decision taken by the majority of the annotators, e.g., if two of them considered that the tweet discussed politics, it was classified as such.

1. Come on Sam Ryder! Make Europe like us again 🙌🙏 #Eurovision #Eurovision2022
2. It looks like Europe has finally forgiven and accepted the UK as part of Europe (again). Lol. Sam Ryder great job, took us from 0 points laughing stocks–to title contenders. Well done to Ukraine, hopefully, peaceful times soon. #Eurovision2022 #bbceurovision

Corpus annotation by multiple human annotators must be checked for reliability, since one annotator may considerably deviate from the rest due to a different reading comprehension of the tweets (Artstein & Poesio, 2008). To calculate Inter-Annotator Agreement (IAA) we used the Disagree Python library. We calculated both Krippendorff's *alpha* (α) coefficient (Krippendorff, 2004) and Fleiss's *kappa* (κ) coefficient (Fleiss, 1981). In our dataset, both metrics returned the same results for each sample, which are shown in Table 2. Results show very high agreement levels, which confirm the validity of the annotated sample. The final gold standard was arrived at by majority of vote.

Table 2. Inter-annotator agreement metrics.

Sample	N (tweets)	Agreement
Sam Ryder	500	$\alpha = 0.829$, $\kappa = 0.829$
James Newman	500	$\alpha = 0.876$, $\kappa = 0.876$

4. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

4.1. Sentiment analysis

Sentiment analysis of the tweets, as shown in Figure 1, yields very positive results. Following the three-way classification, 73.18% of the tweets are classified by *Lingmotif* as positive, while 17.03% and 5.57% are identified as neutral and negative, respectively. The positive semantic orientation also predominates in the binary classification, with 85.08% of the tweets classified as positive.

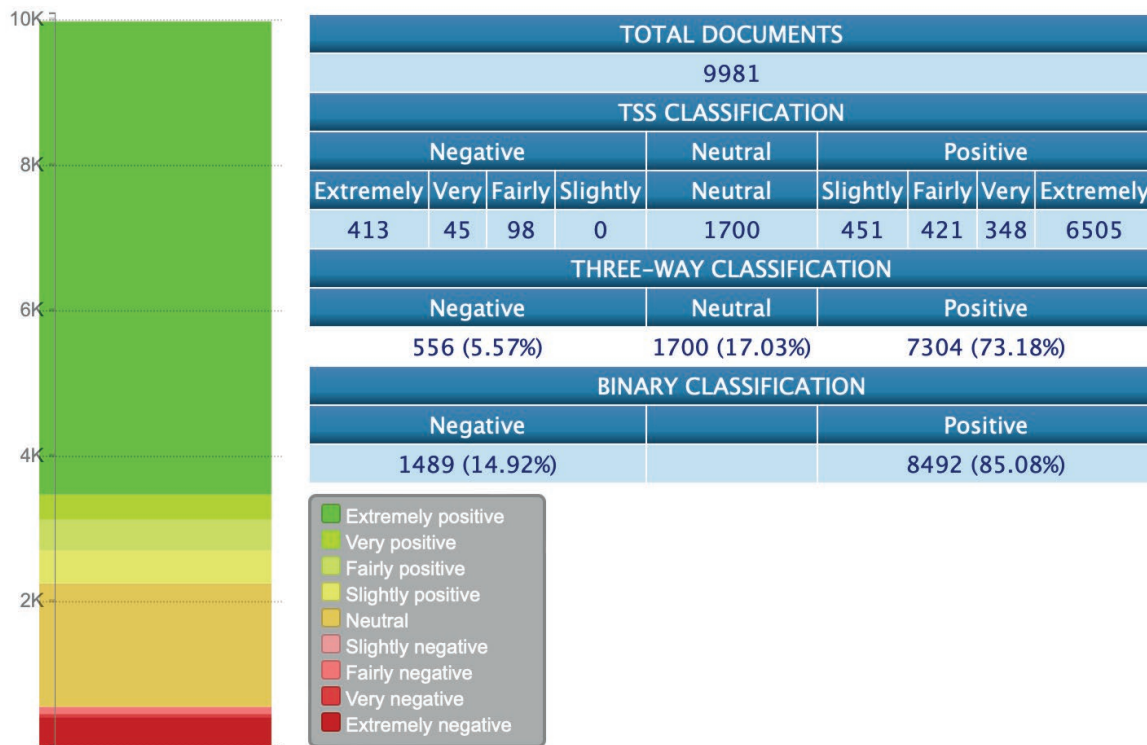


Figure 1. Sentiment analysis of the corpus.

Table 3 below shows the top 10 positive and negative items identified by *Lingmotif* in relation to Sam Ryder, as well as their rank and absolute frequency in the corpus. Please note that these items have been lemmatised.

Table 3. Top positive and negative items identified by Lingmotif for Sam Ryder.

Rank	Top positive items	Abs. Frequency	Rank	Top negative items	Abs. Frequency
1	well done	2504	1	bloody	166
2	👏	1623	2	😡	139
3	win	1510	3	fuck	88
4	🥰❤️	1100	4	🔥	82
5	congratulation	1067	5	not win	79
6	🚀	786	6	rob	65
7	do proud	753	7	lose	60
8	amazing	717	8	hate	54
9	love	599	9	hell	43
10	winner	532	10	die	43

Regarding the top positive items, we find congratulatory expressions (e.g., “well done”, “win”, “congratulation”, “do proud”) whereby users express positive messages towards Sam Ryder. This makes sense if we keep in mind the very good result that the artist achieved in the contest. Several emojis conveying positive connotations were also identified, such as the clapping hands, hearts, or the rocket, referring to Sam’s song title (i.e., *Space Man*). This can be seen in (3).

- Well done Sam, Obviously Ukraine deserve the trophy but we know 2nd was always gonna be the winning song 👏 🚀 ❤️🇪🇺 Eurovision

On the other hand, we find negative items such as “bloody” or “fuck”, which are often used with a positive intention, as in (4)-(5), where users employ such negative expressions to emphasise their positive statements. These examples, nonetheless, must not be confused with instances of sarcasm, but rather as a form of emphasising the overall message, which is generally positive.

4. Sam Ryder, you were **fucking** amazing and deserve a parade when you get home. #Eurovision
5. Second place, how **bloody** amazing to prove the naysayers wrong 🇺🇰 #SamRyder #Spaceman #Eurovision2022

Even when we do find the aforementioned negative expressions used with a negative intention, they are not directed towards Sam Ryder, but rather towards Eurovision itself and how politics is believed to play a key role in the contest's voting process, as shown in (6)-(7).

6. **Fuck** politics! #SamRyder is the #winner of #Eurovision2022
7. #SamRyder would've won if it wasn't for **bloody** Putin! #Eurovision

Despite entering the top 3, Sam Ryder is still considered to have been “robbed” of his win. While his result is something to be proud of, many of his fans believe that only the first position should have been the appropriate result for him. Therefore, this negative term is not used against him, but rather to support him. While in (8) the speaker simply states that Ukraine did not deserve to win (be it for political or artistic reasons), the user in (9) suggests that politics meddled in the contest's results and that if it had not been for the war, Ukraine would not have won Eurovision. In other words, the term “rob” is used as a metaphor to show disagreement with Ryder's result and, simultaneously, support him.

8. Well done Sam Ryder—you've done us proud! #Eurovision Ukraine aren't worthy winners they're 🇺🇰 Sam Ryder was **robbed** ❤️🇺🇰
9. Agreed it's supposedly a singing contest #SamRyder was **robbed**. #Eurovision2022 Predictable. Goes to show it's not about the best song (clearly the UK) but all about the political climate

This brings us to consider that although *Lingmotif* classifies such instances as negative, these examples show that, on many occasions, these words are not used with malicious intention. Instead, the intended meaning tends to be positive, which leads us to believe that the actual percentage of positive messages in the corpus is even higher.

4.2. Political discourse

In this section, we discuss, from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, the presence of political discourse in Sam Ryder's corpus. To carry out the quantitative analysis, we compared the presence of references to politics in Ryder's dataset with that in Newman's, as shown in Figure 2.

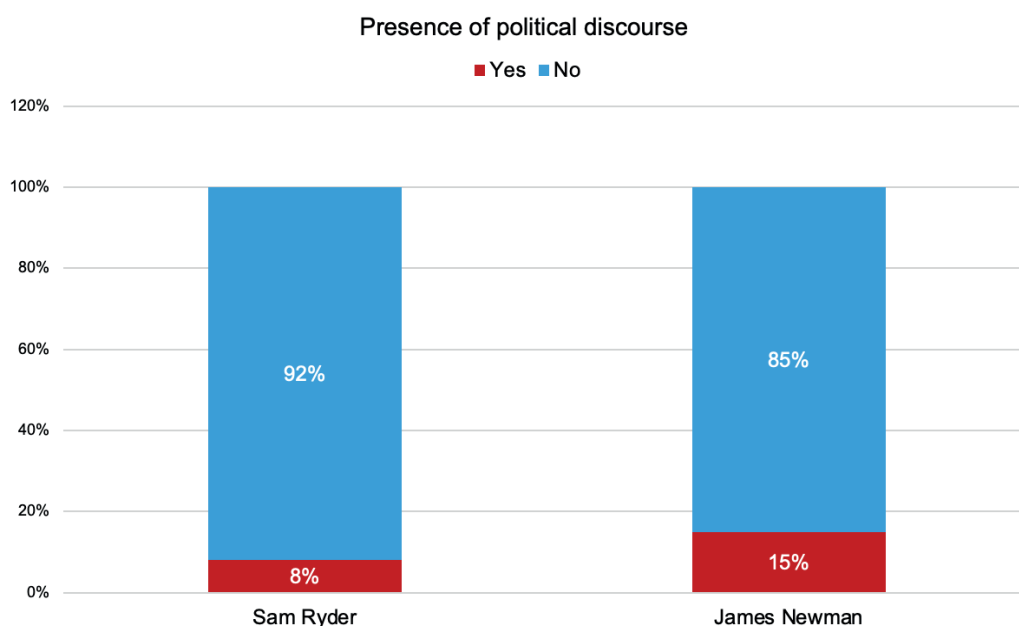


Figure 2. Presence of political discourse in Sam Ryder's and James Newman's datasets.

The results obtained show that political references are more prominent in Newman's dataset, with 15%, while only 8% were identified as containing some political references in Ryder's tweets. These results may be justified by the positions obtained by each of these representatives. While it was widely believed that Ryder would have won if the war had not taken place, the truth is that he earned a very good result, so users generally avoided blaming politics. On the other hand, Newman did not receive any points but many *eurofans* still believed that he had a good song and consequently blamed the political setting for his bad result.

Two observations can be extracted from these results. The first one is that politics does not play such a key role in people's opinions about the contest. While it is one of the main themes when it comes to defending their favourite participants, the majority of the users do not associate the results with a political motivation. The second observation is that the position obtained in the contest does seem to affect its association with political bias. In other words, finishing the contest in last place might lead to a higher percentage of political references in tweets about the artist, that is, Twitter users tend to blame politics for bad results.

In order to analyse qualitatively the political discourse contained in Ryder's corpus, we used the *Keywords* and *Concordance* features available in *SketchEngine*. Table 4 lists the top 20 single-word and multi-word keywords identified in Sam Ryder's corpus.

Table 4. Top 20 single and multi-word keywords extracted by SketchEngine.

Rank	Single-words keywords	Score	Multi-word keywords	Score
1	ryder	4300.9	sam ryder	7584.9
2	eurovision	1350.0	space man	656.8
3	congratulations	562.5	jury vote	603.4
4	sam	467.5	public vote	343.6
5	congrats	386.5	huge congratulation	322.7
6	ukraine	349.8	song contest	318.8
7	spaceman	349.0	second place	266.5
8	congratulation	300.2	sympathy vote	244.6
9	knighthood	220.7	amazing performance	235.9
10	slava	213	uk entry	230.0
11	omg	195.3	nil point	225.6
12	proud	166.9	amazing result	219.1
13	leaderboard	166.4	worthy winner	215.9
14	kalush	143.9	great song	195.1
15	tiktok	143.8	other year	191.7
16	chanel	113.7	real winner	170.2
17	smash	94.4	fantastic result	169.3
18	moldova	87.2	huge congrats	168.3
19	televote	71.0	great performance	162.7
20	wow	67.3	massive congratulation	155.1

Positive expressions prevail in the top single 10 keywords: "congratulations", "congrats", "proud", and even "slava" are among the most used (in the case of "slava", English-speaking users tweeted their greetings in Romanized Ukrainian to show respect). References to other countries are also widespread. For example, Moldova, which finished Eurovision in the seventh position, was one of the most beloved contestants. As shown in (10)-(11), users tweeted about Moldova being one of their favourite participants alongside Sam Ryder.

10. Loved **Moldova** but so excited for Sam Ryder!! Soooo good! We could do this!! #Eurovision 🤗are we going to do this #Eurovision

11. I can imagine doing a really fun and energetic dance workout to the **Moldova** song which makes it a winner for me. ❤️ I do hope Sam Ryder gets some points though. #Eurovision

But in terms of political references, Ukraine is the leader in mentions because it won the contest. However, bearing in mind that our corpus is based on Eurovision tweets with a specific focus on the U.K.'s representative, many of these messages question Ukraine's win over Sam Ryder as a consequence of the war, as in (12)-(13). In this sense, users feel that Sam Ryder is not only the rightful winner, but also the victim of an injustice caused by the political climate.

12. Sam Ryder would have won the Eurovision Song Contest if not for the unjust war in **Ukraine** 🇺🇦 #Eurovision
13. #Eurovision2022 Sam Ryder was robbed all because of what's going on in the world, Sorry not sorry! **Ukraine** had a good song but Eurovision winning worthy 🙄🙄

Multi-word keywords also include positive messages (e.g., “huge congratulation”, “amazing performance”, “amazing result”, “great song”, etc.). Apart from these positive expressions, the voting system is another element that users often talk about, since “jury vote” and “public vote”, two relevant aspects of the contest, are two of the main keywords. Examples (14)-(15) below show how users discussed Sam Ryder winning the jury vote yet coming in second on the public vote. Ryder's followers celebrated his deed as something to be proud of despite coming in second, as the U.K. had not reached a better position in many years.

14. #Eurovision2022 We **WON** the **jury vote**, we came second overall, this is insane for all us UK eurovision lovers. Sam Ryder has been amazing throughout.
15. We won the **jury vote**, came second on the **public vote**, but frankly I'd feel terrible if we beat Ukraine. Well done 🙌❤️🇺🇦 What a night! #Eurovision2022 #teampaceman

Nevertheless, in this edition, users also referred to a third type of vote: the “sympathy” vote. It was widely believed that Ukraine's win was a consequence of other nations showing their allegiance to this country. In other words, their victory was a manifestation of European unity. Rather than the best song, users believe that Eurovision was won by the country who, politically, needed the most support at that moment. As can be seen in examples (16)-(17) below, speakers use this expression to state that Sam Ryder actually deserved to win the contest, and that he would have won if the war had not taken place.

16. #SamRyder knows his song got those points for being a fantastic song, and of course the way he sang it. He didn't need a **sympathy vote** to get points, he got this points purely on merit.
17. Ukraine 100% got the **sympathy vote**. @SamRyderMusic was amazing and should have won.

A closer look at the tweets that include politics-related terms reinforces the fact that Ryder's followers blame Ukraine's victory on the political context. Terms such as “politics” or “political” are present in 282 tweets (1.64%), and users employ them to talk about Sam deserving to win the contest, as in (18)-(19).

18. Isn't eurovision about music not **politics**?! What's the point in having any competition if solidarity is the reason why a country wins rather than genuine talent. My heart goes out to people of Ukraine but this wasn't about the war?!
19. Congratulations Sam Ryder! Take **politics** out the window the UNITED KINGDOM would have won! So many great songs this year! #EUROVISION

Direct mentions of the war, however, represent a small proportion of tweets: only 0.75% include the terms “war” (117 occurrences) or “invasion” (11 occurrences). References to Russia are also marginal, since only 0.54% include this term. As expected, users generally mention these to complain about Ryder's result. Once again, they suggest that Ukraine's win is a consequence of the war, and that if the political circumstances had been different, Eurovision results would have varied greatly, as in (20)-(21).

20. However, quite disappointed with this result. It was a good song—and I of course support 🇺🇦 during this war—but this is not about music anymore. Such a shame. #SamRyder is my winner!!! 🇬🇧 #Eurovision @bbceurovision Amazing.
21. Sam Ryder was brilliant, Ukraine were brilliant but would they have got that public vote if not for **Russia's invasion**? What a great show though! #Eurovision2022

Although Brexit and its consequences have marked the political and historical context that the United Kingdom is currently experiencing, the truth is that only 102 tweets (0.59%) refer to it, which is a marginal amount. When users do refer to Brexit, they do so to question whether Ryder's good result is a consequence of Europe having forgiven the United Kingdom for their decision to leave the European Union. Ryder is thus viewed as an entity that can lead to the forgiveness of political decisions that have affected the economy of the UK and, of course, the European Union, as in (22)-(23).

- 22. I don't want to jinx this, but has Europe forgiven us for **Brexit**? #Eurovision2022
- 23. I firmly believe that if Sam Ryder went on TV and told everyone we didn't vote for **Brexit** his shiny, happy personality could gaslight all of Europe into believing him. #Eurovision2022 #Eurovision

The results from this analysis suggest that the political language found in this corpus revolves around a particular theme, which is Ukraine's win over the United Kingdom because of the war. Nevertheless, users generally complain about Ukraine winning the contest using the expression "sympathy vote", but they rarely mention the conflict directly, most references being implicit.

4.2. Comparison with James Newman (Eurovision 2021)

To explore whether the final result obtained in the contest had an influence on people's opinions, we decided to compare tweets where Sam Ryder is mentioned with tweets about James Newman, the U.K.'s representative in Eurovision 2021. Despite the grievance of finishing in the last position and earning zero points, James Newman's tweets, as shown in Figure 3, are quite positive: 52.38% are classified as such, while 21.52% and 20.14% are identified as neutral and negative, respectively. Therefore, his results are quite different from those obtained by Sam Ryder. Although positive messages largely prevail in Newman's dataset, the proportions differ considerably from Ryder's.

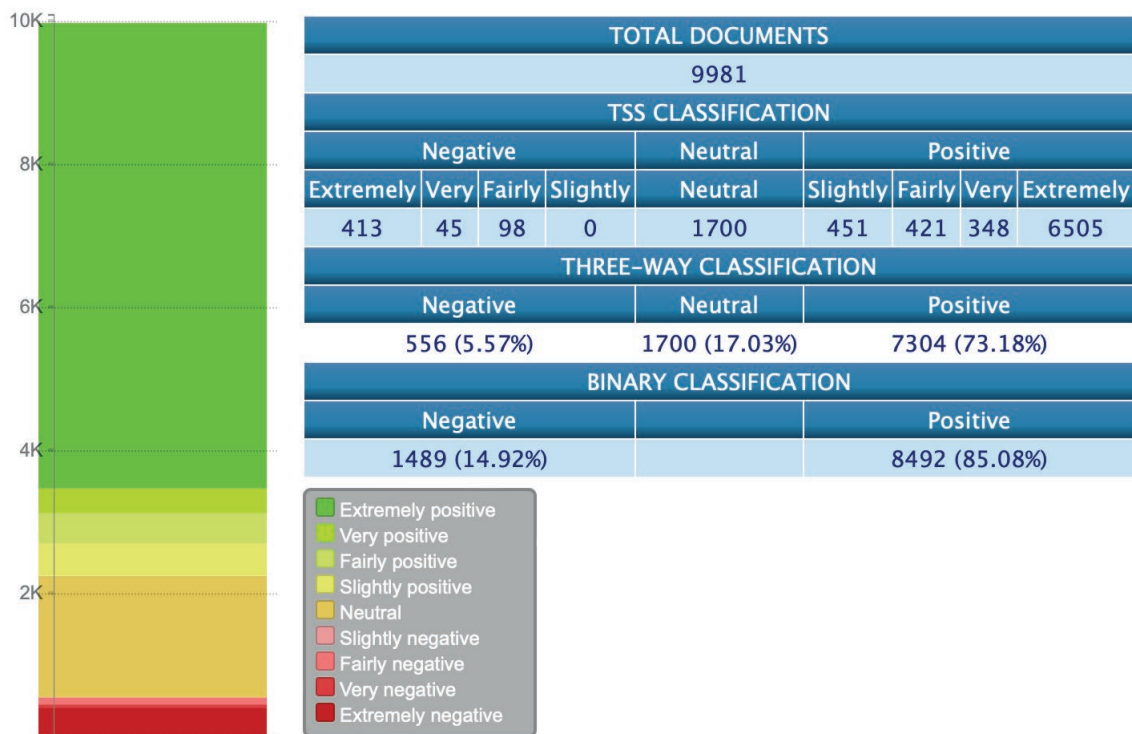


Figure 3. Sentiment analysis for James Newman.

Table 5 shows the top 10 positive and negative items identified by *Lingmotif* in relation to James Newman, as well as their rank and absolute frequency in the corpus. Once again, please note that such items have been lemmatised.

Table 5. Top positive and top negative items identified by Lingmotif for James Newman.

Rank	Top positive items	Abs. Frequency	Rank	Top negative items	Abs. Frequency
1	love	465	1	poor	123
2	👏	278	2	hate	109
3	good luck	270	3	🔥	102
4	well done	267	4	fuck	71
5	🔥❤️	267	5	😞	59
6	win	193	6	bad	48
7	good	176	7	shit	40
8	do proud	164	8	fault	38
9	great	149	9	so bad	38
10	best	144	10	rob	34

The top 10 positive items also include expressions of congratulations towards James Newman (e.g., “love”, “good luck”, “well done”, “do proud”). Thus, users also expressed positive thoughts towards this artist in a higher proportion than the negative ones, despite his result. Emojis conveying positive messages were also found in the corpus: as with Sam Ryder, the clapping hands and heart emojis were among the most used, as illustrated by (24).

24. He handled that so well. 👏 well done @JamesNewmanUk 🙌❤️ #eurovision

Regarding the top negative items in James Newman’s dataset, there is no shift in the polarity of the negative expressions employed to talk about him. In other words, expressions such as “fuck”, which also appeared in the top negative items used in relation to Ryder (but with a positive intention), are now used with an eminently negative intention behind them. Nevertheless, the overall semantic orientation of the whole tweet is positive towards the entity under analysis. Let us explain this with examples (25)-(26), where both users employ “fuck” with a negative polarity, but the speakers do not direct that anger towards James Newman himself, but rather Eurovision as a biased setting.

25. There is no way James Newman deserved 0 points. What a **fucking** joke. I don’t know what was wrong with the #Eurovision jury and the public vote.

26. Gutted for @JamesNewmanUk Don’t let that result put you off. You were amazing tonight & it just goes to show how **fucked up** #Eurovision is. Time for the UK to bow out and not pay big bucks for something we will never win again.

As a starting point for our discourse analysis, we used *SketchEngine* and its *Keyword* feature so as to investigate the main multi-word keywords (which we consider provide the richest information about this dataset), as well as the possible presence of political language in this corpus. Table 6 lists the multi-word keywords extracted by *SketchEngine* for James Newman’s dataset.

Table 6. Top 20 multi-word keywords extracted by SketchEngine.

Rank	Multi-word keywords	Score
1	james newman	12487.8
2	nil point	915.7
3	uk entry	477.7
4	song contest	326.6
5	great song	286.5
6	nul point	268.6
7	fair play	244.0
8	good song	216.3
9	poor james newman	207.3
10	good luck	192.7

The multi-word keywords mainly focus on Newman's results at the contest: "nil point" and "nul point" both refer to Newman obtaining zero points in Eurovision. Another multi-word keyword that is concerned with Newman's results is "fair play". The artist's followers consider that Eurovision, and implicitly European voters, treated the singer in an unfair manner and that they were guided by political voting. In this sense, the main rhetoric is that of Europe hating the United Kingdom and thus punishing them for leaving the EU by not voting for them. In spite of this, according to users, Newman was still able to react with elegance, hence the use of "fair play" in (27)-(28).

27. Can't help but laugh at how much everyone hates the UK 🤔 Do the whole show using our language, allow us to participate and all so the political style voting can give us NOWT 🤔👤 Fair play for giving it a go James Newman and great reaction #Eurovision
28. @JamesNewmanUK How? He wasn't bad but of course the rest of Europe hate us, he should have gotten points #Eurovision Fair play to James Newman and his reaction. Best of British right there. It wasn't a great song, but it was by no means the worst

The tweets that include politics-related terms confirm the presence of this particular rhetoric. Newman's followers, as (29)-(30) show, blamed his bad results on the political context and bias that are thought to surround the contest, rather than the quality of his song. The terms "politics" or "political" were present in 233 tweets (of 4,424), i.e., 5.27%, which is a proportion considerably higher (over 3x) than Sam Ryder's tweets (1.64%).

29. The song was actually really fun, but being from the UK was a huge disadvantage. Little to do with the song, more to do with the politics and history. We saw it coming, but I feel sad for James Newman. #Eurovision
30. YOU DID AMAZING @JamesNewmanUK You didn't deserve 0 points! You were brilliant and so was your song. Sadly politics get in the way #Eurovision

As with Sam Ryder, we set out to investigate whether Brexit is usually mentioned in relation to James Newman. References to Brexit are present in 151 tweets, which means a percentage of 3.41%, i.e., almost 6x the percentage found in Sam Ryder's tweets (0.59%). In the case of the 2021 contestant, however, Brexit is viewed as the main cause of this representative's results. In other words, it is an object of blame, as viewers seem to believe that Europe hates the United Kingdom due to Brexit and associate Newman's final position with this political context, as shown in (31)-(32).

31. Welcome to Brexit Britain! Where all of Europe hates the English. Poor James Newman. Another Brexit victim! #Eurovision
32. We already knew we weren't popular on the continent anyway. #Eurovision is fixed politically and if brexit didn't happen which it did happen and I am proud of it, we would have had 1 point instead of 0.

5. CONCLUSION

The results obtained in this study evidence that congratulatory messages prevail on Twitter for both U.K. representatives, which is to be expected. The results yielded by the comparison between Ryder and Newman suggest that positive messages prevail regardless of the results obtained. Thus, both artists receive laudatory comments in general, which indicates that obtaining the second or the final position in Eurovision does not affect public perception towards them.

In both cases, even negative terms are generally not used with a negative intention towards the entity (be it Ryder or Newman). In the case of the former, these negative expressions tend to be used to emphasise positive messages. In the case of the latter, there does not seem to be a negative intention towards the artist himself, but rather towards the contest and the voting patterns that surround it. This leads us to believe that it would be interesting to carry out an aspect-based sentiment analysis on this corpus, as it would allow us to distinguish more than one entity and to take into account the different aspects that are relevant in this particular cultural context. That way, we could distinguish more precisely between criticism directed towards Eurovision and that directed towards the representatives or their songs.

Regarding the actual impact of politicisation, it is very low in absolute terms. Political references do not prevail in the opinions of the artists' followers about the contest, as most users do not justify the results with a political reasoning. Despite this, the outcome of the competition does seem to be influenced by its association with politics, as finishing the contest with a bad result might lead to a higher proportion of political allusions, as users attribute

fault to the political milieu. Nevertheless, the actual level of politicisation should be measured in relative terms, the question being “is the proportion of political references higher in these two years than the average of the last 10-20 years?” Unfortunately, data from all these years would be necessary to establish a valid baseline.

In qualitative terms, the political theme differs depending on the representative. The political language found in Ryder’s corpus revolves around Ukraine’s victory over the United Kingdom as a consequence of the war. Furthermore, it can be inferred that users express discontent with the winning nation through expressions such as “sympathy vote” or implying that in any other year the United Kingdom would have won the contest, although they generally avoid direct references to the war itself. Conversely, the political language found in Newman’s corpus centres on the subject of Brexit and its impact on Europe’s perception of the United Kingdom.

Regarding the “social distancing” between the U.K. and the EU as a result of Brexit, references appear to contingent upon the position obtained by each representative. In the case of Sam Ryder, these references are viewed as something slightly “positive”: Ryder’s figure is considered an element that can lead to Europe’s abatement of its concerns regarding Brexit. In the case of James Newman, references to Brexit are intensely negative and, to a certain extent, they blame Eurovision as a biased competition.

Ultimately, Eurovision appears to be a good reflection of certain social and cultural issues of a geopolitical entity that attempts to bring together a heterogenous mixture of peoples and cultures, and thus, since its inception, has been constantly striving for unity and identity.

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