

saying: “Of course it is not difficult to respond to the questions, similar to those one is asked by border authorities when entering into the US, in the right way and immediately you find yourself in the delicate presence of committed protectors of the environment” (2010, p. 145). This obstacle was dealt with by completely anonymising the interviews, which was clearly communicated to the interview partners beforehand and guaranteed via a data privacy form.

Of course, in this way the researcher’s classification of who is seen as an expert played a fundamental role: “Already at this point it becomes apparent that at the end of the day what enters into the thesis as expert knowledge lies in the discretion of the researcher” (Schirmer, 2009, p. 195). Moreover, it is necessary to reflect on what role the person speaks in in the research moment. Since the expert status in most cases resulted from the experts’ occupational roles, they potentially saw themselves as representatives of their particular field which may have had consequences for the openness with which it was spoken. Therefore, it must be recognised that the experts did not provide *facts*. Instead they presented matters that they judged out of their special professional perspective, which in turn was being supplemented by personal motivation as well as aspects stemming from several social contexts. “Hence it is about open, secluded, secret, reflected, un-reflected, formal or informal, conscious or subconscious knowledge” (*ibid.*). Since all these knowledge types are important in their own right, the challenge consisted in bringing to the table a certain sensitivity for reading *between the lines* in order to adapt the interview strategy to each conversation respectively as well as for the subsequent analysis.

In one of the expert interviews it became apparent that the questions in the two sections *responsibility* and *efficacy* were not perceived as distinct (enough). Consequently, the interview guide was adapted slightly. Overall, the guideline succeeded in repeatedly prompting the conversations, yielding a series of relevant and comparable answers in each interview. Furthermore, a few high-ranking politicians could be recruited, which allowed a valuable insight into the connection of information and power that presents one key focus of the present study.

It proved unproblematic to find interview partners as they all, by the nature of their occupation, had a pronounced interest in the topic. However, disappointingly, an AfD-member of the Bundestag cancelled his (long planned) interview on very late notice. It would have been particularly interesting to see how a politician who does not speak out for climate action would have answered these same questions.

3.5 Media analysis

This study’s main aim was to establish “the connection to the social fields of practice and the specific expectations for concrete [relational] offers and etiquette” (Bremer, 2004, p. 16). As one-on-one interviews alone are not equipped to deliver this, “fig-

uratively speaking, the bigger picture [...] needed to be refined through a close-up” (ibid.). In doing so, this study went beyond the individual and gained access to social dynamics unfolding in the collective, as such group dynamics and –effects have hitherto remained substantially under-researched.

Responsibility as relational concept

How responsibility for climate action and related expectations of (perceived or actual) efficacy were being handled collectively was therefore, in a first instance, investigated through an analysis of media discourses.

This comprehensive media analysis was carried out to fulfil the following two goals:

1. Investigating the *collective* societal treatment of climate action (by using material that referred to one another as well as analysing comment threads and discussions on social media)
2. In order to paint a more inclusive and complete picture, gaining an insight into the *public's* thought patterns and motives for action, so that they could be compared with the individual elite discourses already recorded through the expert interviews.

In doing so, insight was also gained into the stances of those social groups who occupy social spaces between the two poles of climate scepticism and strong support for climate action, i.e., the large share of the population who is not particularly opinionated in either direction when it comes to climate action.

In addition to conventional media types, this empirical step was also concerned with the new forms of social media, “which indicate new vehicles for the transmission of knowledge [and] may transform power relations and ultimately what counts as knowledge” (Goldblatt, 2004, p. 122). Here, those who are the loudest and most opinionated are generally also the most visible, which one must be aware of when undertaking research. Leading communication scientist Mike Steffen Schäfer (2012) identifies a certain discrepancy between the influence and efficacy commonly ascribed to social media and the attention that they have hitherto been granted by research. Research has so far also “mainly focused on individual-level effects on peoples’ problem awareness, their level of information, and their willingness to act” (ibid., p. 9). By contrast, in this study, the focus lies with the diverse cultural influences that can be identified on social media platforms. This part of the study concentrates mainly on ‘embodied knowledge’ as these non-linguistic, experience based embodied types of knowledge are paramount as forms of socially shared information. As Peter Dahlgren argues, particularly in online environments it is necessary to:

... examine how the hegemonic and contested currents find expression in the Web 2.0 milieu, and we can assume that these currents are driven by both rational and affective elements, with the latter seemingly on the ascent. Media culture generally overall seems to be moving ever further away from the ideals of the traditional public sphere and its rational character.

Dahlgren, 2012, p. 9

This study's engagement with social media content and its insights into cultural standpoints towards climate policy is therefore uniquely equipped to do justice to these alternative but by no means inferior emotional aspects of 'knowing'. Promisingly, these are increasingly being recognised as bringing some of the answers that considerations of information deficits have not.

Whether in its conventional or new social vesture, media coverage of climate change provides particularly rich evidence of climate-cultural variations, a fact that remains seriously under-appreciated in much social-scientific work on culture and climate change. This study responds directly to this research gap by examining diverse media reports on climate change in Germany around the 2019 European elections, with a view to demonstrating which climate cultures (do not) feature in public debates on this important topic. A qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was chosen, with material deriving from four interrelated sources across TV, print and social media:

- A. Debates on climate change in three German prime-time political talk shows: *Hart aber fair* (hard but fair) presented by Frank Plasberg (25/03/2019), *Anne Will* (05/05/2019) and *Markus Lanz* (27/06/2019)¹. The format of these three talk shows is very similar, with prominent politicians and public figures discussing current affairs in a more or less confrontational way. This said, *Markus Lanz* deviates somewhat from the other two in that this show appears a little less elitist due to the less formal demeanour of the talk show host and the wider selection of guests which often includes both prominent political figures as well as members of the public 'with a story to tell'.
- B. Comments and discussions posted on two social media platforms (Facebook² and Twitter³) following social media postings by the producers/administrators (when possible) of the three talk shows. Examples of dialogue and exchange

1 These talk shows typically reach an audience of approximately 3.5 million viewers.

2 *Anne Will*: No Facebook: <https://www.daserste.de/specials/service/community-index-spalte1100.html> (accessed 02/06/2019).

3 *Hart aber fair*: <https://twitter.com/hartaberfair/status/1109100001685319682> (accessed 02/06/2019). *Anne Will*: <https://twitter.com/AnneWillTalk/status/1125302263906480128> (accessed 02/06/2019). <https://twitter.com/AnneWillTalk/status/1125289706000912386>

received particular attention. For example, responses divergent to the previous participant that suggest differences in climate culture are listed **in bold** in the second table under 'direct opposition' (see chapter 5). In connection to *Hart aber fair*, the analysis covered two threads on Facebook and Twitter that emerged in response to the administrator's introductions of the talk show guests Ulf Poschardt, editor-in-chief of the conservative Welt news group, and then German Minister for the Environment Svenja Schulze. The editorial team of *Anne Will* did not maintain a Facebook account (at the time of analysis) but two Twitter threads were analysed. Regarding *Markus Lanz*, it was more difficult to find social media content, so the material was limited to one Twitter thread.

- C. Online news articles from influential German news producers and leading weekly political magazines that covered and commented on the three talk shows.
- D. YouTube videos by the two well-known influencers Rezo (channel: *Rezo ja lol ey*) and Mai Thi Nguyen-Kim (channel: *maiLab*) on the topic of climate change, which appeared around the same time as the talk shows.

The choice of sources reflects the intention to capture as broad a range of views and statements as possible (without being representative in the statistical sense of the term). Data collection took place from October to December 2019 and was carried out almost exclusively online, with the exception of a printed version of an article in *Der Spiegel* (23/2019) covering the posting of the famous Rezo video (the destruction of the CDU) and its aftermath. The talk show material was transcribed and subsequently translated from German into English, complementing printed text and social media comments.

Using Kuckartz's (2012) typifying approach to qualitative content analysis, the collected material was examined to identify and subsequently compare statements regarding climate action and related issues of responsibility, efficacy and knowing. Given that there is no societal consensus regarding who should take the lead in promoting climate action in Germany, the responsibility attributed to, and efficacy expected of different societal actors (individuals, politicians, the media, private sector, scientists) received particular attention. The iterative analytical process combined deductive and inductive elements. An a priori interest in the role of different societal actors in climate change debates, the use of apocalyptic/catastrophic vocabulary and the topic of individual responsibility informed the initial choice of methodology and material. The subsequent identification of different climate cultures happened inductively through a very close and repeated (re-)reading of the data.

(accessed 02/06/2019). *Markus Lanz*: (difficult to find) https://twitter.com/Markus__Lanz/status/1144308596257230849 (accessed 02/06/2019).