Satire for Sanity: An examination of media representation and audience engagement with The Daily Show's Rally to Restore Sanity

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis examines the media representation of *The Daily Show's* 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and the way the rally participants engaged with it. This was a unique event because of the speculation and ambiguity that surrounded it which included characterisations of activism for civil discourse, advocacy for Democrats in the run up to the Congressional mid-term election, to those labelling it as a mass comedy/music event. Also, given that *The Daily Show* was shifting from its television platform to the field of public protest, this was an opportunity to examine whether the rally could push the boundaries of satire by instigating a more civilised tone in America's political news discourse. The rally would also be an opportunity to better understand the type of people that engaged with this hybrid satire event and whether their attendance was an act of civic participation.

To provide a comprehensive analysis of the event an ethnographic study was carried out in order to observe the people that participated. This illustrated whether the participants attended as activists, fans of the show or a combination of both. Research interviews were also conducted with the rally participants to understand why they attended and how they judged the effectiveness of the event. A content and framing analysis of global news articles was conducted in order to gauge how the rally and the participants were perceived and also the potential long-term impact the rally may have had on America's popular and political culture.

On the basis of these empirical findings this thesis argues that the rally was perceived as a political event, but its satirical traits and its absence of clear aims and objectives meant that the rally could not realistically change America's political dialogue. Also, while the research demonstrated that the rally participants were politically active individuals, their attendance was more akin to the role they adopt as viewers of *The Daily Show*. Their limited role was attributed to a number of factors including; political cynicism and polarisation, a result of engagement with satire and partisan news programmes. It is the combination of these findings that led to the rally's ineffectiveness and lack of political impact. Although this study does not present an optimistic representation of alternative platforms of hybrid satire, it does illustrate the power of the satire genre. After all, the rally was able to garner the attention of thousands of Americans who collectively identified with its core message. Furthermore, the research shows how the boundaries of satire are continually shifting to incorporate new ways of engaging with politics and its audience. As a result, this study recommends further research on hybrid satire to examine whether it can move beyond its current platform of critical inquiry to encourage new forms of political action.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On 16 September 2010, *Daily Show* host Jon Stewart announced that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' would take place on the 30 October 2010 at the Washington Mall. According to Stewart, this was an event for ordinary Americans who were tired of the polarised and extreme political rhetoric in the country's news media (Stewart 2010a). The rally attempted to mobilise the American public to gather on the Washington Mall to send a message to the country's political leaders and national media that a more cerebral approach to political discussion was needed to help solve America's 'real' political problems. This initial invitation suggested that *The Daily Show,* (which throughout this study will be known as *TDS*), was moving from its usual critical TV format to an activism/advocacy role. But over the coming weeks the rally's intentions became increasingly blurred as Stewart publicly announced, in a series of interviews, that the event was not a political event or statement (Stewart 2010b). It was simply a chance for "nice people to get together for fun, special guests and great conversation" (Stewart 2010b). While Stewart did his best to 'downplay' the rally's intentions, *TDS* fans and the media continued to speculate on its intentions due to factors such as the rally's location and its proximity to the Congressional mid-term election which refuted Stewart's claims that it was an apolitical event.

The mix of different guests and features on the day of the rally did not make its overall intentions any clearer. At the rally there was music, as well as experiments from the Mythbusters and a benediction for the crowd courtesy of *SNL*'s[1] Father Guido Sarducci. The rally's 'sanity message' came into play when Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert handed out medals of praise to ordinary citizens, celebrities and news organisations for demonstrating civility and restraint. There was also a video montage of various cable TV pundits – from both the left and right wing networks - engaged in the vitriolic discourses that the rally was attempting to highlight and dispel (Jones et al 2012). Even Jon Stewart's rally speech illustrated the ambiguity of the event, when he asked the crowd, "So, uh what exactly was this?" Incidentally, he himself did not have an answer for this question.

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[1] *Saturday Night Live*

Despite the confusion over its intentions the rally was clearly a hit with some parts of the American public as over 250,000 people attended the event. But even after the rally had taken place, the people's motivations for attending were still unclear. Furthermore, neither the event's intentions nor its effectiveness and impact could be clearly defined. The ambiguity, speculation and intrigue surrounding this event was the primary motivation for this study, which will examine the news media's framing of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and the people that attended. Moreover, this thesis attempts to answer the question that Jon Stewart himself could not answer – what exactly was the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'?

The rally is a unique topic of investigation because it fell outside of the normative boundaries of *TDS*. *TDS* itself is a satirical fake news show which has been a late night fixture on *Comedy Central* since 1999. The show, hosted by its nightly anchor Jon Stewart, uses satire, entertainment and news to create a form of hybrid programming that critiques current affairs and holds the media and political world accountable. In turn, its reporting approach helps inform audiences on political and social issues while also making them laugh. This is played out in the show's opening monologue where Stewart critiques current news events and in discussions with the show's fake news correspondents. The latter interview section of the show can also offer laughs or political and academic insight as Stewart interviews range from well known comedians to scientists and military personnel. It would appear then that *TDS's* structural format, its mixing of different genre, its communicative approach and coverage of the Presidential elections since 2000 have led to new levels of popularity and critical respect (Goodman 2004). The media industry for example have awarded the show a wealth of awards including 18 Emmy's and 2 Peabody awards for both comedy and its contribution to journalism and honesty in public language.

TDS has also become increasingly popular with the American public, particularly with young people under the age of 50 who tune into the show for political and election news coverage (Pew Research 2010, 2012). Audience identification with the show has certainly raised the cultural and symbolic capital of *TDS* as Stewart was named 'the most trusted newsman in America' over conventional news reporters (*Time Magazine* 2009). Even though *TDS* closely resembles the news agenda of cable news

programmes, Neilson ratings indicate that it has become more commercially successful than these other outlets, averaging over a million more viewers than the highest rated news channel, *Fox News* (*The Daily Mail* 2011). Its success however is not just attributed to the comedic aspects of the show, but its journalistic and populist approach. For example, in its advocacy and reporting of the Zadroger Act that was barely featured in the mainstream media until Jon Stewart covered. Stewart was also praised for his guest appearance on *CNN's Crossfire* programme where he denounced their use of partisan theatre and lack of substantial bipartisan debate (Baym 2010: 82). These examples in particular demonstrate how the show has been able to cut through the conventions of news reporting by raising issues and highlighting important news events that are vital to the formation of public opinion in the public sphere.

It has already been a popular subject of study for scholars who have debated its democratising and critically engaging approach to reporting political news. For some, the show is responsible for 'dumbing-down' news content (Temple 2006). It has also been argued that its satirical wit encourages political cynicism and alienates citizens from the political process (Hart & Hartelius 2007, Baumgartner & Morris 2006, Feldman 2007). A more substantial body of research has challenged these views, arguing that satire can be an essential element of democracy because it can invigorate political interest (Baumgartner 2008: 293). *TDS* has the freedom to adopt this approach because it does not operate within the conventions of journalism that are restricted by factors such as news values and commercial imperatives. Thus, unlike traditional news formats, *TDS* can make news "more meaningful" by unpacking the spin and rhetoric espoused by the political and media classes (Hairman 2007) and encouraging its audience to question the news they receive (Jones 2010: 235).

As a product of the post-network era *TDS* has crossed the boundaries of comedy and journalism with relative success. Indeed, some sectors of the journalism industry have voiced their discomfort with Stewart's role, as they see his actions as an infringement on journalistic authority (Winch 1997, Carlson & Peifer 2013: 7). However, renowned journalists such as Bill Moyers (2011) and Maureen Dowd have expressed their admiration for the show's influential role in political news reporting (Baym 2010: 5). But, organising a rally in a public space known as the heartland of American politics is definitely unfamiliar territory for a programme that defines itself

as 'fake news'. It is the intention of this study to examine whether this new satirical platform could push the boundaries of hybrid satire further by immersing itself into the fields of activism and advocacy. Such actions could potentially fly in the face of satire's capabilities because while satire can draw attention to social ills, scholars (Griffin 1994, Maddow 2010, Freedman 2009: 3) argue that it does not have the power to influence political change

Unlike *TDS,* which draws attention to political and social issues, the rally attempted to go one step further by advocating a change in current political communication practices. This, accompanied by the ambiguous discourses and nature of the event, illustrates the importance of studying this unique event that brought *TDS* (albeit through a different format) and its audience together. This study identified 4 main areas of analysis: the media's reporting of the event, how the media framed the attendees and the events effectiveness and its potential impact. The event also offered me, the researcher, the chance to gain a personal perspective on the people that attended.   Currently, much of the research on *TDS* audience offers an insight into their relationship with the show and the potential link between watching it and acts of civic participation (Goldwaite-Young & Esralew 2011, Brewer & Cao 2011, Baumgartner & Morris 2006). This information was obtained from National Annenberg survey data. Their research presents conflicting arguments regarding both cynicism (Baumgartner & Morris 2006) and active political participation amongst these viewers (Goldwaite-Young and Esralew 2011: 112). However, by personally interviewing a number of the rally attendees, this study provides additional perspectives on these arguments, by asking the rallygoers questions concerning their political participation in everyday life and whether their attendance at the rally was also a demonstration of active citizenship. Also, like the questions aimed at the media's reporting of the rally, the study attempts to clarify how the rallygoers judged the event's effectiveness and impact.

By posing these questions the information gathered informs the 2 central elements of this study: the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and the people that identified with the event. First it will illustrate the way in which the rally was perceived by the news media. This was important given the satirical and ambiguous nature of the event which meant that the rally could have been reported in a multitude of different ways.   By

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examining global news coverage of the event and speaking to the attendees, the study highlights its effectiveness and whether this alternative satirical venue could have achieved the same amount of praise as the conventional TV show. Moreover it may broaden the scope of satire research by illustrating its potential to alter political practices or highlighting its limited capabilities: drawing attention to social ills as opposed to changing them. The second central topic of this study, the participants, will provide greater insight into the type of people that engaged with the event. The first level of analysis will examine the media's perception of the rallygoers and whether they were reported as fans, activists or other traits associated with *TDS* viewers, such as their age or political outlook. The second analysis will look at the political participatory habits of the rallygoers, their reasons for attending and their conduct and behaviour at the rally.

1.1 Structure & Approach to the Research

This thesis consists of 9 chapters. Following this introductory chapter there are 3 literature review chapters. Chapter 2 situates the historical foundations and theoretical frameworks of citizenship and democracy because these are used as a foundation to analyse the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and whether such an event could be perceived as a genuine platform for democratic and citizen participation. The remainder of the chapter explores contemporary models of democracy with particular attention being paid to the work of Habermas and the public sphere and theories and perceptions of deliberative democracy. These theories have particular relevance to this study because of their links to the news media, which was one of rally's central targets. Furthermore, the chapter will examine democratic theories aim for rational and civilised approaches to political problem solving, which also relates directly to the rally's core message.

Chapter 3 addresses the historical transformation of the news media in America from the late 18th century to the present day. A significant proportion of this chapter concentrates on the changes brought about by the relaxation of the Fairness Doctrine and how this led to technological and content changes in news programming. The changes that will be discussed i.e. the infiltration of entertainment and partisan news formats were of chief concern to the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', as Jon Stewart argued that sensational, vitriolic and partisan displays of news had become destructive to the premise of fourth estate journalism. As a result, the remainder of the chapter

discusses the democratising abilities of partisanship and popular culture in news to determine their effect on contemporary journalism and how citizens engage with news and acts of citizenship.

Given that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was organised by *TDS*, Chapter 4 concentrates specifically on research surrounding this show. As a product of the post-network era that has been criticised for melding news and entertainment, this chapter illustrates how *TDS* has become an increasingly popular and trusted platform for political news commentary. The chapter considers how and why *TDS* has become a go-to news resource by examining its ability to serve the public sphere and the concept of fourth estate journalism. This will include discussions on its accessibility to audiences and its role as citizen surrogate. Central to this discussion is the show's ability to adopt traits that are not practised by the mainstream news including its counter-hegemonic critiques of the political world and news media. Despite the wealth of positive research on hybrid satire shows, their audiences and their impact on civic participation, this is still a relatively new field of research. Therefore, because the rally had the potential to invite acts of citizenship, the remainder of the chapter debates the potential impact that engagement with hybrid satire may have on civic participation.

In Chapter 5 the research aims and objectives are explicitly stated and the most appropriate methodological framework is outlined. The rationale behind the research questions is also discussed in the opening of this chapter. The methods that were chosen combine a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis that were based on a range of different materials. Content and framing analysis were used to study the news coverage of the rally. Ethnography was used to closely study the rally participants and their behaviour at the event and the interviews helped gauge their political participation habits and their motivations for attending.   The chapter also shows how each method added additional support and insight into to answers obtained via the overall research questions.

The analysis, presentation of the findings and discussions are delivered across three chapters. Chapter 6 concentrates on two main areas: the media's framing of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and a discussion relating to the absence of detailed coverage

of the event. Prior to this, the chapter discusses the conflicting arguments and publicity surrounding the rally and why this may have led to ambiguous or confused coverage of the event. The results in this chapter show that a multitude of frames were used to characterise the rally including comparisons to Glenn Beck's rally, Woodstock and those that actually reported it in relation to its core message. But, in most cases, the rally was perceived by the media to be an event that would encourage Democrats to vote during the mid-term election. This is a result that challenges Jon Stewart's original description of it as 'apolitical' and refutes the idea that satire is resistant to media manipulation.

By drawing on the content analysis of rally news coverage, the latter part of Chapter 6 examines the absence of detailed reporting. While this section argues that the event may not have warranted detailed coverage it also highlights other contributing factors such as journalistic norms and conventions as a justification for the type of coverage that was produced. It is argued that other dynamics like the rally's inability to fit neatly into conventional frameworks of protest, and the fact that the event was un-reliant on the news media for publicity may also have led to the type of coverage that is presented and discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 7 is focused entirely on the rally participants. Section one of the chapter details the media's framing of the rallygoers, which is also supported by the ethnographic field notes and interviews with a number of the participants. Here it is discovered that the attendees were chiefly described through frames that undermined them and detracted attention away from the rally's core message.   To understand people's engagement and conduct at the rally, this chapter also examines the civic participation habits of the rallygoers. It is discovered that most of them engaged with politics via thin demonstrations such as voting. However, many were apprehensive about partaking in thick demonstrations of citizenship, such as political deliberation, because of the potential negative consequences. This is an interesting result that, in part, informed people's reasons for attending the rally and their inability to engage in more substantial demonstrations of participation at the event.

Chapter 8 analyses the news media's and rallygoers' overall perception of the event and whether it made any impact on America's popular and political culture thereafter. The results obtained from the interview process and data collection show that the rally

was largely described through pessimistic responses. This is because its inclusion of satire and popular culture traits made it an ineffective platform for political engagement. Given the largely negative perception of the rally as a whole, it is not surprising that it made no discernable impact on America's political dialogue. Part 2 however discusses how the rally's legacy and impact can be judged through other means including the success it achieved for *TDS* brand and how it may have acted as a gateway for Jon Stewart to push the boundaries of satire even further thereafter.

The final chapter of the thesis, Chapter 9, reiterates the aims of the study and the questions posed. The findings obtained from the combined methods show that the rally was successful in that it was able to capture the national media's attention. Furthermore, it was able to mobilise thousands of American people to go to the Washington Mall, many of whom identified with its core civility message. However, the findings also show that the rally's aims to create a more civilised political discourse were unrealistic because of the multifaceted nature of the event and its lack of clear aims and objectives. The limitations of the rally's success are also attributed to the behaviour of the participants because while many supported the rally's message this was the full extent of their involvement. This study then illustrates the constraints of the satire genre because it can only draw attention to social ills. But it also shows how other contributing factors such as time and engagement with popular culture and partisan news might have also impacted on the political behaviour of the rallygoers. As a result, this thesis recommends that future studies on satire audiences and political participation take into consideration the lives and news viewing habits of those being studied. This study also asserts that scholarly discussions around the limitations of satire are likely to be challenged in the future. This is because in the months following the event, Stewart proceeded to push the boundaries of satire further by becoming directly involved in advocacy journalism. In sum, the chapter concludes that hybrid satire can successfully garner public support and attention to political and social issues, but it does not have the power to fix them. However, as the limits of satire are shifting to incorporate new ideas and capabilities, this study argues that scholars should continue to study TV satire and its alternative platforms to see whether it can move from critical inquiry to forms of political action.

Chapter 2: The Importance of Democracy & Civic Participation

Introduction

Central to this chapter are theoretical discussions relating to the practice of citizenship and democracy. These discussions will later be used as a foundation to analyse the 'Rally to Restore Sanity's' civility message and whether it was perceived as a genuine platform for political participation. Before getting into the more detailed analysis of the rally and the citizenship practices of the attendees, this chapter will start by examining the terms that will play a key role throughout this chapter: citizenship and democracy, and how they contribute to our understanding of active participation in the political process.

The remainder of the chapter will examine the different models and theoretical frameworks of democracy to illustrate how they have impacted on perceptions of citizenship throughout history. Particular attention will be paid to the role of the media and Habermas' public sphere, which not only accounts for the role of the press within a democracy, but also for other platforms of civic involvement. Once the historical roots of the public sphere have been established and its potential to encourage rational political discourse, there will be a critique of the Habermasian approach. It is here that the work of Fraser (1992), Deluca and Peeples (2002), Marcus (2002) and Mouffe (2005) will be considered to show how technology, emotions and alternative political groups have expanded the possibilities of democracy and civic involvement so that new approaches to democratic practice can be recognised.

Given the 'Rally to Restore Sanity's' civility theme and invitation for citizens to mobilise in support of this message, it is hoped that this chapter will provide a better understanding of how the event may have contributed to ideas surrounding democracy and citizenship. That is why the examination of alternative and redeveloped forms of democracy and civic participation are central to this study. After all, the rally could be characterised as an alternative political platform, thus the theories characterised by Deluca and Peeples, Marcus and Christiano will inform this study as to whether the event encouraged new forms of civic participation.

2.1 Defining Citizenship

Citizenship is a relatively fluid term which cannot be characterised through one definition alone, but the status requires individuals to adhere to a set of conditions so that the role of the citizen can be properly exercised. For example, T. H. Marshall's definition asserts that it is a "status bestowed upon those who are full members of a community, all those who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed" (Cited in Wahl-Jorgensen 2009: vii). Marshall's definition favours an egalitarian approach in that all citizens are, and should be treated equally. To maintain this egalitarian approach, the practice of citizenship is accompanied by a specific set of duties and obligations. The disposition of the individual is imperative, as Kelsey-Fry and Dhillon (2010: 8) argue that when committing to the role of the citizen, the individual has to be a fair and reasonable person. This is a necessary component of the conditions for citizenship because it enables the individual to communicate their own opinions effectively, but also to listen and appreciate the opinions of others. Consequently, this is an approach that Jon Stewart favours in his rally invitation as he felt that civil discussion was absent from contemporary practices of political deliberation.

Citizenship then can be characterised as a form of action and in this study it refers to individuals who participate in the political process. For Street et al (2013: 25), the ideal type of citizen is an active participant in a democratic society. Yet, the extent to which citizens are 'active' is dependent on their level of involvement in the political process. Tilly (1995:8) attempts to contextualise these levels of involvement by proposing two levels of citizenship, described as 'thick' and 'thin'. The latter entails minimal transactions and obligations, such as voting. The former however, "occupies a significant share of all the transaction rights and obligations sustained by state agents and people living under their jurisdiction" (Ibid). Put simply, 'thick' demonstrations of citizenship go beyond minimal transactions such as voting, and instead a greater emphasis is placed on other methods of involvement. Coleman and Blumler (2009: 4) suggest that this can include deliberation with other citizens about political issues that should be discussed in an honest and open-minded way. It can also be an attempt to influence or change public policies, which can range from putting up posters, joining a political party or pressure group to demonstrating in the streets (Ibid).

What can be deduced from the different levels of citizenship activities is that the role of the citizen is still an important one in Western society, given their involvement in decision making processes. Scholars Bellamy (2008: 7) and Faulks (2000: 1) believe that it is the most effective platform for citizens to promote their collective interests. Moreover, it allows them to have a hand in shaping common governmental institutions by encouraging political rulers to pursue the public's good, rather than their own (Ibid). By working as a collective, citizens can be highly influential in effecting and changing the rules of government. Norris (2002: 5) supports this argument, stating that when citizenship and democracy are functioning properly, it leads to a more informed citizenry and better policies and governance. This is evident in many historical examples of citizen campaigning that have led to a series of freedoms and rights that are enjoyed today. For example, Faulks (2000: 3) illustrates how campaigns for the extension of citizenship have ranged from the anti-slavery movement in Britain in the 18th century, the women's movement demanding the right to vote in the early 20th century, and African Americans in the 1960s campaigning for civil rights. Citizenship then can be recognised as an imperative feature of a healthy society, as it allows people the opportunity to adapt and potentially change the political and social structures of their environment. Furthermore, it encourages members of that society to respect and learn from one another in what Bellamy (2008: 12) calls "equal concern and respect". These aspects of citizenship and the level of involvement in the political process are the defining elements of democracy. The following section explores the different models of democracy and how each of them required a rethinking of the meaning of citizenship and their level of involvement in the political process.

2.2 Models of Democracy

Translated from its Greek origins, the term 'democracy' means rule of the people. Democracy is a form of government where citizen involvement is central to its existence and practice. Held (1996: 3) presents a detailed vision of how democracy should be practiced, in that it is:

> A space relating to political equality, liberty, moral self development, the common interest, a fair compromise, binding decisions that take everyone's interests into account, social unity and the satisfaction of wants and efficient decisions.

Carpini (2004: 396) reaches a similar conclusion, adding that democratic society is that of an egalitarian, inclusive society, with equal opportunities for all to influence directly, or indirectly, the quality of public life for oneself and others. The term 'democracy' presents the idea of a fair and equal form of government that requires participants to embody the same characteristics when they are participating in public life. The definitions also suggest that democracy is a space where people come together as equals, regardless of class or race. It is in this space that political or social issues are discussed, negotiated and agreed upon in a fair and civil manner. These explanations could be viewed as a utopian vision of democracy, rather than its practiced reality. This is true when considering that from the 5th century to the present day, ideas and theoretical frameworks of democracy have been reconceptualised, contested and reworked to account for theoretical shortfalls and social and political changes. Despite the historical reworking of the term, democracy will always be inextricably linked to the *polis* - citizen participation in political and social issues and the extent to which they are involved in this process (Held 1996: 1).

As mentioned above, the processes of democracy and citizenship have been reconceptualised over time to minimise citizen involvement in politics, or to encourage a more inclusive approach to its practice. The first model; class Athenian democracy encouraged what Tilly would consider a 'thick' and highly involved approach to civic participation because an emphasis was put on the involvement of citizen participation in the process of governing. For example, Held (1996: 17, 18) asserts that sovereign power did not actively contribute in the affairs of the state. In reality, the model was rife with contradictions and problems, for example; the idea of complete citizen inclusion is contested by Held (1996: 23) because only a small proportion of the male population were included in the realms of decision making. Furthermore, the process excluded the presence of women and slaves as neither groups had political rights, even though they were part of the largest group living within the vicinity of Athens[2] (Bellamy 2008: 31). As documented later in this chapter, central to the practice of democracy and citizenship is the premise that the individuals involved are reasoned and well informed (Norris 2002: 6). Yet these attributes were largely absent in many Athenian citizens. Intellectual anti-democrats,

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[2] The number of actual citizens residing in Athens was between 30,000 and 50,000, whereas the slave population was around 80,000 to 100,000 (Bellamy 2008: 31)

such as Socrates and Plato, argued that because the majority of people were ignorant and unskilled, they couldn't contribute effectively (Cartledge 2004). Thus, while the Athenian model enabled *some* citizens to practice thick citizenship demonstrates civic participation, it was an art or skill that ought to have only been entrusted to intelligent, rather than average, citizens (Cartledge 2004).

The direct model of democracy practiced in ancient Athens was eventually eclipsed by the rise of Christianity. Here power shifted from citizens and other sources of authority, to religious establishments (Pocock 1975: 550). Thus in sharp contrast to the Greek view, that the *polis* (or citizen) was the embodiment of political good, the Christian world view insisted that good lay in submission to God's will (Held 1996: 37). It was not until two thousand years after Athenian democracy that a more representative political philosophy emerged courtesy of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527). Like Socrates and Plato, Machiavelli had a pessimistic view of the public and the Athenian model of democracy. He conceived of the "generality of men as self-seeking, lazy and incapable of doing anything good unless constrained by necessity" (Machiavelli 1983: 200, 201). He believed that direct democracy was futile, because citizen involvement in the decision processes of government would be inherently selfish and would have no regard for the common good of the people. In response, Machiavelli cultivated a theoretical framework that mutually accommodated both government and society. Government would maintain legal bearing, yet they would have to do greater deeds including fostering peaceful progress and respecting local organisations in order to gain public trust and recognition (Brown 2007). In return, citizens would have to abide by institutional law and uphold religious worship for them to attain more rights, regardless of their social or monetary status (Held 1996: 52).

While Machiavelli was not a democrat, his approach can, on the surface, be read as a very specific form of representative democracy - whereby the government is founded on the principle of representing the people. Yet on further investigation, it can also be considered a decidedly limited approach if compared to the Athenian model because of the absence of citizen involvement in the political process. The latter model valued an egalitarian approach to political decision making, whereas Machiavelli believed that the ends of the state were above those of the individual. Thus if citizens were not

in agreement with the decisions reached by government, then their public platform would be taken away and government force could be used against them (Held 1996: 53). The original definition of democracy - the rule of the people - was therefore rejected by Machiavelli, who believed that power and the decision making processes of government should reside with the powerful, rather than ordinary citizens.

Thomas Hobbes, a 16th century political theorist, was primarily interested in the psychology of citizens and representative forms of democracy. Hobbes shared a similar view to Machiavelli, believing humans to be self-interested with a driven desire for power (Hobbes 1968: 161). Hobbes followed the 'state of nature' philosophy that considers the hypothetical conditions of peoples' lives before the idea of society and democracy came into existence. He believed that when unconstrained by law, the life of human beings was solitary, brutish and short - yet as humans multiplied, the problem of how to preserve their rights became more and more acute (Brugger 1983: 15). Because of the innate self-interest of humans, Hobbes argued that individuals needed to be protected from each other, thus he advocated a combined representative and protective approach. Here citizens would have to surrender their rights of self-governance to a powerful single authority which would then act on their behalf (Held 1996: 75, 77). Hobbes' model is a far cry from the classic model of democracy discussed earlier, because citizens had no part in the decision making of government. Furthermore, those individuals in positions of power (the Sovereign) took on an autocratic position where they were not answerable to the people and neither where they subjected to the same rule of law. They were only answerable to God, as only God could punish the Sovereign, so long as the Sovereign was able to guarantee the security of individuals who made up the commonwealth (Brugger 1983: 15).

The philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) had similar reservations about the role of the citizen. He asserted that if people did not fully trust each other, then why should they place their trust in an all-powerful sovereign to look after their interests? (Held 1996: 78). Despite his reservations, Locke had a more optimistic view of the individual, believing that the law of nature specifies basic principles of morality - people should try to preserve each other and should not infringe upon one another's liberty (Held 1996: 79). Locke also acknowledged the pivotal role that labour and

money play in the formation of civil society, arguing that it only came into existence when the economy developed (Brugger 1983: 27). The formation of government and a liberal model of democracy were necessary, because it would enable the protection of the economy and so that the property rights of individuals could be safeguarded under law (Ibid).

Unlike other political theorists of that time, Locke acknowledged the rights of citizens within a democratic system. However, he believed that their involvement and consent should be limited to what Tilly (1995) identifies as 'thin' conceptions of citizenship. Participation would be limited to the inauguration of the legitimate civil government, or in the formation of a government if the previous one had flouted the terms of their contract (Held 1996: 81). Unlike other political theorists discussed here, Locke's liberal model of democracy delivers a constructive and realistic approach to the practice of citizenship and the formation of democracy. This is because the premise of the model centres on a philosophy of limited government as a necessary requirement to ensure individual liberty (Steinberg 1978: 24). The consequence of this approach is that for those citizens who lacked knowledge and interest in the decision making process of government, their involvement in the democratic process was limited. In addition, the advantage of limited government meant that citizens, unlike in the models advocated by Machiavelli and Hobbes, were awarded more rights because the government could not exert extensive control over peoples' lives and actions. Despite the inherent benefits of Hobbes' take on citizenship and democracy, Brugger (1983: 19) and Held (1996: 82) have criticised Locke's lack of context in conceptualising his theory, because he fails to account for who the active citizen is, the level of political interference in peoples' lives and also under what conditions should the government be ousted by another. In spite of these criticisms, Locke's theory helped inaugurate one of the most central tenets of European liberalism; limited government interference. In short, government exists to safeguard the rights and liberties of citizens who are ultimately the best judges of their own interests, and smaller government ensures the freedom of every citizen (Held 1996: 82).

While Locke favoured a limited role for citizen participation in democracy, the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (17-12-1778) conceived that citizens should have a more progressive and involved role within society. Rousseau affirmed the notion of

the active, involved citizenry who would come together to decide what was best for the community and then enact the appropriate law (Held 1996: 57). In contrast to the work of Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau believed that individuals were trustworthy, as prior to the development of civil government they were contented in their original 'state of nature'. It was the development of civil society and the class system that created social misery and oppressive social hierarchies because of unequal distribution of wealth and power (Held 1996: 57, 60, Steinberg 1978: 83). To enable more equality and liberty for the poor, Rousseau argued that a law-making body should be formed to enforce legislation calling for more cooperation amongst the masses (Steinberg 1978: 84). Thus, similarly to the direct democracy model, Rousseau's approach would enable citizen involvement in the state and their participation would be encouraged.

Rousseau's model went beyond the perimeters of the Athenian model by addressing the arguments put forward by Socrates and Plato. He argued that a functioning democracy should expand human creativity to enable their transition into an educated citizenry that could approach the more complex issues of government and policy (Brugger 1983: 21, 22). Thus, in contrast to Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau (1973: 153) advocated an equally measured form of democracy where citizens could all enjoy the same rights by becoming collectively involved in the decision making processes of government. This newfound responsibility would be tested under Rousseau's notion of the 'general will', whereby the individual preference of the citizen would have to be suppressed in favour of the collective good (Street 2001: 266, 267). Thus, while citizens had a more extensive participatory role in comparison to those marked out by Hobbes and Locke, they would still have to abide by the decree of majority rule (Held 1996: 58).

Rousseau's model of democracy stands out because it advocated a highly involved approach to political participation, yet it recognised that provisions should be put in place to ensure that citizenship would be practiced fairly. Rousseau acknowledged that people's opinions may differ, thus making it difficult to reach a consensus, so by binding people under the decree of majority rule and the "supreme direction of the general will", they had to accept that only the "votes of the greatest number [of people] always bind the rest" (Rousseau 1973: 153). Put simply, not everyone's

opinions and issues would be addressed, only those that obtained the backing and support from the largest group of citizens. There are a number of ambiguities found in Rousseau's work, particularly in relation to the extent and working practices of citizen involvement within the general will. General will requires citizens to reach a consensus, yet Rousseau does not describe how this is achieved. This is particularly true if the model was applied and practiced in larger city states where it would be more difficult to create an environment where such a discussion could take place. The notion of general will is also problematic, because valid arguments and debates may be missed and could lead to exclusion. Rousseau's premise of consent through the common good then is not always achievable. This is particularly true in diverse and pluralistic societies where the laws should reflect the different interests and opposing wills that are distributed amongst its citizens (Steinberg 1978: 94).

The practices and theoretical notions of democracy that have been examined thus far illustrate the contested descriptions of the role of the citizen and government within society. John Stewart Mill (1806-1873) was able to address the issues surrounding authority and liberty by constructing a theoretical approach to democracy that has been widely appreciated as one of the most eloquent accounts of democratic government (Held 1991: 10). He believed that citizen participation such as; voting, involvement in local administration and jury service was vital in creating a direct interest in government and thus a more informed and developed citizenry who had a stake in society and political decision making (Held 1996: 100). Mill however was not advocating a direct form of democracy, but a representative model where government would be more efficient and accountable, and unhindered by corrupt practices and complex regulations (Held 1996: 101). However, Mill recognised that for a society to work coherently, the role of government should be limited. Social or political interference with individual liberty could only be justified when "an act (or failure to act), whether it be intended or not, concerns others and then only harms others" (Mill 1982: 68). The model advocated by Mill is very similar to the liberal system of democracy practiced today, for it acknowledges the role of the citizen and limited government. Furthermore, it also advocates the premise of the free-market economy, freedom of speech and a watchdog press which will contribute to the formation of democracy and the practice of citizenship (Held 1991: 95, 239, 240).

What can be gathered from examining these different models and practices of democracy is how levels and views of civic participation have fluctuated throughout history. Civic participation in Ancient Athens was a highly involved method of citizenship where ordinary citizens took part in the process of governing. In contrast, the models of governing set out by Machiavelli and Hobbes failed to award citizens with extensive participatory rights as power and decision making processes resided with the sovereign. The models of democracy that followed slowly established value to the importance of citizen participation in political decision making as Locke supported 'thin' methods of citizenship like voting. Rousseau and Mill however advocated 'thicker' methods of citizenship practices such as public discussions with limited government interference. While contemporary forms of western democracy closely resemble Mill's theoretical framework, it appears that their level of citizen participation is often limited to casting a vote during the election period.

A series of factors such as distrust in government, technological advancement and working commitments have, according to Putnam (1995: 76), led to the demise of 'thick' practices of citizenship in contemporary society. This reduction in citizenship practices however raises questions about the citizens' ability to make an informed decision when casting their vote. This problem persists with face-to-face modes of participation as preceding notions of shared public discussions between citizens and the state have slowly disappeared. Thompson (1995: 132) raises this argument in his book *The Transformation of Visibility*, where he asserts that the democratic premise of a shared locale has become despatialised and non-dialogical - which is now linked to the distinctive kind of visibility that is only achievable through the media. Before the development of the press, the 'publicness' and democratic practices of individuals was linked to the sharing of a common locale where face to face interactions would take place (Thompson 1995: 125). The development of the news media, however, created new forms of publicness, such as the printed word found in newspapers. Thompson (1995: 126) asserts that:

> The printed word became a medium for the official proclamation by representatives of the state and as a medium through which opposition groups could highlight actions and events that might otherwise have passed unnoticed: both were means of constituting phenomena as public for individuals who were not physically present at their occurrence.

Here Thompson argues how newspapers became central to the democratic process because citizens had little direct contact with the state. Yet the newspaper platform still enabled them to learn about key societal issues. Since that time, the media have had to embody a number of important responsibilities because it is through this medium that an informed electorate can be formed (McNair 2000: 1). It is not just contemporary scholars who have acknowledged the important role of the media in democracy. John Stewart Mill believed that the publicity that it produced would guarantee that the *whole public* could participate in its own governance (Baym 2010: 44). Mill also asserted that the media were important for maintaining the accountability of the state, for if the government was exposed to the media's "light of publicity", then they would be more inclined to act in accordance with the will of the governed (Ibid). This study hopes to determine whether the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' functioned in a similar fashion to the media by encouraging civic participation - holding not just the political world accountable, but also the news media.

2.3 The Democratic Role of the Media

Likened to the three estates of government that work on behalf of citizens to debate political and social issues and pass appropriate laws and legislation, the press or news media became known as the fourth estate because of their significance to democracy too. The news media have a number of responsibilities which include making the public aware of the current issues of government by giving voice to those in positions of political, corporate and social power (Schultz 1998: 1). It was also the job of the media to take on an active role that would encourage the formation of an informed citizenry. This role is summed up by Street (2001: 253) as:

> Providing a political forum…to enable people to choose between
> those who wish to stand for office and to judge those who currently
> are in office and, secondly, to provide a platform for interest
> groups to publicize their concerns and claims. This means
> informing citizens about their (prospective) representatives' plans
> and achievements; it also means reflecting the range of ideas and
> views which circulate within society, subjecting those who act in
> the name of the people to scrutiny, to make them accountable.
> These conditions allow citizens to make informed choices.

Similarly to other media scholars (See McChesney 2001, Gleason 1990, Wheeler 1997), Street articulates the role of the media as watchdogs of those in power. By adopting this role, the media are able to scrutinise truth from lies on behalf of the

public so that they are fully aware of the facts prior to casting their vote on Election Day. In the same way that citizen participation is important to the functioning of democracy, it is also vital to maintaining a healthy media system. Thus, the media have an obligation to provide a platform for diverse public debate so that ordinary citizens' interests are consciously represented, regardless of their social states or cultural differences (Shultz 1998: 3, McNair 1999: 99, Wahl-Jorgensen 2008: 3, Street 2001: 257).

Many of the philosophers and political thinkers discussed in this chapter have written extensively about democracy prior to the emergence of the large-scale mass media. But today the media is central to peoples' everyday lives thus it has become central to the processes of democracy. By creating a public platform it can be argued that the news media are actively involving citizens in public life by seeking out their personal opinions on political and social issues. Lewis et al (2005: 99) stress the importance of public opinion in a democracy because it represents the peoples' collective thoughts on issues of government and politics. Public opinion then has the potential to be a form of political participation because it is important to the decision making processes of government, as policy makers utilise these opinions to determine whether their policies or strategies are met with approval. Furthermore, as citizens are encouraged to expand their knowledge and skills to develop themselves as civic agents, (Dahlgren 2009: 69) the news media have become central to this learning process by informing them about current political issues. The role of the news media in democracy then carries considerable weight. The following chapter will examine how the news media are failing to fulfil this role which is partly why Jon Stewart organised the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. Before that, this chapter will move on to examine more recent theoretical approaches that articulate the role of the media in democracy and political participation. This will give particular significance to understandings of citizenship practices in political satire audiences and whether attendance at the rally was a genuine demonstration of political action.

2.4 Habermas & the Public Sphere
At the core of this study are a number of central themes which are: how citizens participate in politics and the role that the news media and political satire play in educating citizens and facilitating political participation. The theorist Jurgen

Habermas has contributed extensively to discussions on citizenship and the media in particular. According to Wahl-Jorgensen (2007: 11) and Dahlgren (1995: 7, 8), Habermas is influential in the fields of journalism and mass communication because his account demonstrates the centrality of the news media in democratic societies. His theory is also significant to the study of political satire shows like *TDS* because it is a media text that also contributes to discussions on political participation (See Baym 2010: 120, Jones 2010: 210, Baum 2005, Young & Tisinger 2006 128). Habermas (1964: 49) conceptualises the public sphere as:

> The realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body….Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and freedom to express and publish their opinions about matters of general interest.

Central to Habermas' definition of the public sphere is its exclusivity to the general public so that it was not influenced or controlled by private or state individuals. Today, all forms of news media, from traditional outlets like newspapers and TV, to the internet, are considered "the media of the public sphere" (Habermas 1964: 49). The early venues of the bourgeois public sphere were the European coffee houses and salons from the 18th century onwards, as well as news pamphlets that facilitated discussions among people from different locales (Habermas 1989: 31). As time progressed, the bourgeois public sphere laid claim to the critical or "intellectual newspapers" (Habermas 1964: 52) which became central in distributing critical and moralistic debates on public authority. Moreover it created a platform for public discussion where citizens would be actively involved in the political process by voicing the needs of the bourgeois society to the state through the medium of the newspaper. While it was not the only institution of the public sphere, the press did make a positive contribution to bourgeois society. By the 1830's however the press' critical approach became overshadowed by the emergence of mass consumer culture and the infiltration of private and commercial interests, which spelled a dubious future for Habermas' concept (Habermas 1989: 181). These commercial factors saw the critical press transform into a commercialised model where citizens were no longer treated as active citizens, but consumers (Dahlgren & Sparks 1997: 4, Street 2001: 255). During this time news reporting of the political elite also changed; instead of

holding them accountable for their actions, political leaders were critiqued on their ability to become compelling leaders (Habermas 1964: 53, Wahl-Jorgensen 2007: 12). Coverage then was focused on their personality rather than their political decision making, which is a style of media coverage that continues to be practiced today (Ibid).

Prior to the infiltration of private and commercial factors, the public sphere could be read as a positive contributor to the formation of democracy due to its accessibility for citizen participation. Yet, like many theoretical models of democracy discussed in this chapter, Habermas' notion of the public sphere was also rife with limitations and contradictions particularly around accessibility. Scholars (See Fraser 1990: 60, 2008: 61, Dahlgren 1997: 4) however, have highlighted that admission to the bourgeois public sphere was rooted in exclusion towards specific gender and class formations. This point indicates one of the many issues associated with democratic theory as Habermas' model also cannot speak of complete public access and opinion, because it was predominantly affluent, educated males who had access to discussion in the public sphere.

By failing to acknowledge the role and opinions of the lower classes and alternative social groups, Habermas has not considered the possibility of the formation of different public spheres. The likelihood of alternative venues of public deliberation during the bourgeois era is certainly valid. Fraser (1990: 61) concedes that, despite their lack of access to the dominant public sphere, women of various classes and ethnicities constructed routes to public and political life. This process of exclusion was perhaps linked to the level of knowledge that members of the bourgeois society possessed. Many of its inhabitants were literate, educated males - which is why they could be counted on to participate fully and actively in public deliberation of politics. This is a point raised by Dahlgren (2009: 76), who asserts that individuals cannot perform successfully as citizens with an absence of knowledge. While this argument is certainly valid, it has an oppressive undertone which suggests that only the educated have the ability to make valid political arguments. In contrast, uneducated individuals were unable to give a legitimate contribution to the public sphere, despite the part they play in the formation of society. This is problematic, particularly when considering the work of Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*. Their work presents a theoretical framework of the problems associated with industrial capitalism

such as class struggle. In this framework they argue that the bourgeois class were unfit to rule because they exploited the people that worked for them (McLellan 1992: 10, 15). Thus to assume that the public sphere was an egalitarian arena where issues of public concern could be raised is dubious, because it is improbable that the needs of the proletariat would be of chief concern to the bourgeois class.

What can be deduced from Habermas' notion of the public sphere is that it was essentially hegemonic, as its membership and issues of discussion were restricted and set by the affluent and educated class. A similar framework currently operates in the contemporary media where the opinions of the powerful are favoured over ordinary citizens (See Hall et al 1977: 58). While, the advent of social media has resulted in the news media becoming less reliant on official sources like the police (See Hermide et al 2014: 479), their opinions are still integral to defining and offering balance to news stories (See Schulenberg & Chenier 2014, Hickerson et al 2011).   Jon Stewart was concerned about the dominance of elite sources in the news in his invitation to the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'; where he commented that 15-20% of the country [namely politicians and media conglomerates] control the national dialogue. Yet the opinions of 70-80% of the population are virtually ignored (Stewart 2010a) in the mediated public sphere. For this study, the rally becomes an instrument of the public sphere - communicating the general public's concerns to the nation's media and political institutions.

Another precondition of the public sphere was the conduct of rational discussion to enable reasonable consensus. By over-emphasising the importance of rationality, Habermas ignores emotive and passionate forms of participation, action or rhetoric (See Dahlgren 2009: 83, Wahl-Jorgensen 2007: 12, Washbourne 2010: 13). The value Habermas awards to rational discussion might be short-sighted, particularly in relation to deliberative politics, as Marcus (2002: 47) asserts that because politics is a passionate subject matter, emotions are unlikely to exist outside of the reasoning process. For most people, politics is not a subject matter that connotes excitement and stimulation. This is witnessed by the decreasing levels of civic engagement in the UK and America in recent times. Nevertheless, scholars such as Dahlgren (2009: 85), Goodwin et al (2001) and Hall (2005: 215) acknowledge that, in contrast to Habermas's notion that political deliberation serves an abstract notion of the common

good, passionate input is a vital ingredient to civic engagement. Without it, people tend to lack the energy and motivation to become politically active. Marcus (2002: 141) and Bechara et al (1995, 1997) support this assertion, arguing that when presented with a political issue, the rational citizen who acts without emotion is unlikely to react. This is because they do not invest in learning what significance the situation may hold. In contrast, the cooperative engagement of emotion brings, according to Marcus: (2002: 241):

> Introspection, critical and explicit consideration, weighing of the benefits and costs of alternative courses of action, and application of general principles such as impartiality, equality, and reciprocity – can be engaged to help determine the proper course of action. Without the engagement of emotion, reason is likely to be left adrift and uncalled.

There is considerable research therefore that asserts how emotion is integral to encouraging citizen participation and investment in political and social issues. This assertion has certainly gained approval in the field of activism research. Numerous scholars (See Flam and King 2005, Gamson 1992, Eyerman 2005) have argued that emotions such as passion and anger are central to the success of social movements, because they help garner media attention and mobilize citizen support. A social movement's success is also judged on the group's ability to enact social change. Gamson (1992: 32) yet again highlights the importance of emotion to this process, as determination to create political and social changes is far easier to achieve when those advocating change are passionate and fully committed to that cause. The subject of emotion is certainly relevant to this study of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' because the event was attempting to criticise the highly emotive approaches found in contemporary political communication. Furthermore, Jon Stewart only wanted rational Americans to attend the rally because they were the antithesis of the overly emotional individuals found in political news. The study of emotion then is central to understanding the effectiveness of the rally because its absence may challenge the work of Gamson or demonstrate its importance in mobilising citizens and creating political change.

Habermas believes that rational discourse does have its place in the public sphere, particularly in the news media - yet certain platforms like television are actually hindering its practice and consequently the democratic process (Slevin 2000: 77).

Habermas (1989: 170) comments that politically relevant news is read and reported on less and less because of an editorial predisposition towards entertainment based news. Thus rather than acting as the intermediary between the public and the state, the relationship between the media and its readership is defined more in terms of titillating entertainment news which offers a quick indulgence, rather than stimulating the public's use of reason to instigate reasoned debate (Habermas 1989: 170). Slevin (2000: 78) concurs, adding that the contemporary media system is a highly commercialised model that produces emotive and sensationalised news which is "dumbing-down" news content. As media is a modern institution of the public sphere, Habermas' questioning of television's ability to inform and facilitate rational discussion may be well founded. Indeed, scholars such as McChesney (2004) and Lloyd (2004: 15) argue that in contemporary society the media attempt to attract audiences through emotive and sensationalised stories. Sensationalist and emotive stories however should not be disregarded, particularly in light of Marcus' (2002) argument that emotion encourages political participation. Wahl-Jorgensen (2012: 132) and Peters (2011) raise a similar viewpoint, adding that emotion driven stories can call attention to larger social problems by eliciting emotional reactions and thereby securing their involvement.

2.5 Re-developing the Public Sphere

The evidence thus far suggests that Habermas' original concept of the public sphere is out-dated and not strictly applicable to contemporary notions and practices of democracy. Firstly, the theoretical framework is rooted in exclusion because it favours the opinions of the educated, affluent and elite but not those of ordinary citizens. Secondly, Habermas believes that a political consensus can only be achieved through rational discussion. This argument has been challenged by contemporary scholars such as Marcus (2002) and Bechara (1995) who believe that emotive and passionate discourses are central to instigating political action and participation. Finally, Habermas considers that television news is an inappropriate terrain for the public sphere because of its commercial imperatives that favour entertainment over informative news stories.   One model that could act as a necessary supplement to it is Deluca & Peeples (2002) notion of the 'public screen'. This approach accounts for how the technological and cultural changes of the 20th century have transformed the rules and roles of participatory democracy (2002: 127). Deluca and Peeples used the

WTO protests in Seattle as a case study to determine that "television and the internet have fundamentally transformed the media matrix that constitutes our social milieu, producing new forms of social organisation and new modes of perception" (2002: 131). The public screen seeks to push political debate beyond face-to-face discussions and rational dialogue relations between citizens and the political elite found in the public sphere. This makes it a more accessible arena for public deliberation, because it expands the dialogue to various media platforms such as television and the Internet - where citizens can get their message out through different forms of spectacle that encourage media publicity.

Central to obtaining this media exposure is the public's use of the 'spectacle' and it is an approach that has been adopted by various social movements and protesters in an attempt to obtain media coverage and draw attention to the groups' message (Deluca & Peeples 2002: 145, Gitlin 1980: 215). A consequence of its use, in the case of the WTO Seattle protests, is that it encouraged the media to discuss the protestors' aims and grievances (Ibid). The public screen model then enables citizens to bypass the hegemonic discourses and responses set by primary definer sources and present alternative political issues to the general public.

Like the Habermasian model, the public screen is not without its problems, particularly in relation to accessibility and the representation of public opinion. Citizens or groups wanting to obtain media publicity have to be media savvy to create a visually striking event that will warrant media attention. If groups are unable to create a newsworthy event, then coverage of it will quickly disappear or it won't be covered at all. Even if such groups are able to obtain media coverage through the use of spectacle, that is not to say that their aims will be publicised accurately. Milne (2005: 61) for example argues that protesters often find that their aims are re-contextualised or distorted in a way that is highly emotive or simplistic, to make it more accessible to audiences. According to Juris (2008: 84), Routledge (1998: 255) and Murdock (1981: 210, 214, 215), this type of coverage is to be expected when protestors stage spectacular events, because journalists focus on intrigue, irrationality and the appearances of those involved rather than the underlying political issue. In spite of these issues, the public screen is still a worthy and relevant theory that can account for active citizenship in the contemporary media age. It is certainly applicable

to the study of satire, as Amber Day (2011: 148) argues how it has become a contemporary form of protest spectacle that enables groups to capture media attention and access. It is therefore especially relevant to this study of *TDS*'s 'Rally to Restore Sanity' that was rife with elements of spectacle; from its celebrity hosts and music performers to the participants' use of fancy dress and signs to communicate their issues. In light of these 'spectacular' traits, this study hopes to gauge whether the media coverage of the event reflected the same issues highlighted by Milne, Juris and Routledge in that the event was subject to re-contextualisation or distortion.

In response to the various shortcomings of the public sphere and theories of democracy, a series of alternative approaches have emerged. The deliberative democracy model may be the most appropriate framework to account for citizen participation in politics. This is because it takes the central and most important aspects of democracy and public sphere theory to create a more accessible and participatory concept of democracy applicable to contemporary western society. Dahlgren (2009: 86) and Chambers (2009) concur with this argument, asserting that the deliberative model values talk as constitutive of publics and it also builds on Habermas' investigations of critical judgement and rational discussion. According to Christiano (1996: 83) and Street (2001: 268), the deliberative model places emphasis on conditions which allow citizens to reflect collectively on questions of public policy. Central to this is the citizens' ability to listen to the arguments and reasons of others and being prepared to change their minds (Christiano 1996: 83). Thus it is not the intention of the deliberative approach to make decisions based on the aggregation of individual preferences, but rather to allow for deliberation about common purpose (Street 2001: 268).

Christiano and Street's assessment of the deliberative model gives prominence to the art of the common good that reaches beyond the preferences of the individual. A similar approach was also advocated by Rousseau in his concept of the 'general will', whereby individual preferences were suppressed in favour of the collective good. The model has also taken inspiration from John Stewart Mill, who argued that participation in political life was the basis for developing an educated and informed citizenry. Fishkin (1991: 53) and Christiano (1996: 41) add further weight to this assertion, arguing that the deliberative approach is instrumental to political equality

and its educative function. The approach embodies educational aspects for the deliberative process because it develops the citizen's capacity for mutual respect and reasoned judgement which is achieved from exposure to what Dahlgren (2009: 88) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007: 20, 25) identify as 'public-spirited discussions'. Consequently, this should encourage the development of clear justifications for one's choices and decisions. Moreover, with access to alternative opinions, this may challenge their own views and encourage them to readdress their original viewpoints (Ibid). Unlike the previous models of democratic theory that were inaccessible to large segments of society, the deliberative model encourages a more equal and open approach to citizen involvement in the deliberative process. Wahl-Jorgensen (2007: 25) for example, asserts that public access should not just stretch to the reception of political discussion, but also to its production. The participatory role of the citizen then should also include the organisation and formation of these discussion processes and involvement in putting these ideas into practice once an agreement or consensus is achieved.

The deliberative model then illustrates a more accessible approach to democratic practice that is open to a reasoned deliberative approach. This could be considered a rather optimistic practice, especially its description of how citizens function within a democracy. It may encounter the same problems associated with the Habermasian model - its insistence on a rational deliberative approach, which fails to account for emotive rhetoric. As discussed previously, it is difficult to disassociate politics from emotion because it is a subject that generates emotive responses such as passion or anger (Marcus 2002). An emotional approach to political talk then should not be underrated, given its potential to encourage active citizenship and investment in the process of politics. According to Jon Stewart (2010), in his rally invitation, it is emotive approaches to politics that have led to vitriolic discussions found in the contemporary public sphere. Thus it is the purpose of this study to examine whether the civil and deliberative approach advocated by the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' could really change current political communication practices.

Bipartisan discussion is also central to the practice of deliberative democracy, but according to Mouffe (2005: 2), this consensual post-political approach can actually be harmful to the vitality of the public sphere. Mouffe's (2005: 3) approach is grounded

in the work of radical democracy which claims that the approaches advocated by liberal and deliberative democracy theorists have put democratic thinking on the wrong track. As a counterargument, Mouffe (2005: 3) advocates the benefits of partisanship and a vibrant 'agonistic' public sphere of contestation where different hegemonic political projects can be confronted. Instead of an argument between left and right, Mouffe (2005: 5) indicates that political contestation is seen as a struggle between 'right and wrong', or good and evil, in which opposition to a person's preferred ideology must not be proven wrong or contested, but destroyed altogether (Ibid). Mouffe argues in favour of agonistic pluralism, which asserts that far from jeopardising democracy, agonistic confrontation is in fact its very condition of existence. For a democracy to function properly there has to be vibrant mix of political positions and viewpoints. Without this there is the danger that this form of democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation among other forms of collective identity (Mouffe 2000: 17). Furthermore, if too much emphasis is placed on consensus and the absence of confrontation, this can lead to apathy and disaffection from participation (Ibid). The type of agonistic pluralism Mouffe (2000: 16) advocates aims to:

> Transform antagonism into agonism. This requires providing channels through which collective passions will be given ways to express themselves over issues, which, while allowing enough possibility for identification, will not construct the opponent as an enemy…Its task is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus, but to mobilize those passions towards democratic designs.

Central to the formation of the democratic designs that Mouffe speaks of are peoples' desires and passions, which fuel the formation of collective political identities. This is a point echoed by Diana Mutz (2006) in her work on deliberative democracy, which she argues is a widely advocated ideal, yet it is much less popular in practice. Instead, Mutz (2006: 127) asserts that people within homogenous networks encourage and reinforce one another in their view points and that this tendency encourages inclusivity and makes political mobilisation much easier. In contrast, the deliberative model's premise of achieving rational consensus through informed debate can breed exclusion from the political process and consequently silence the voices of those that would have found an outlet though an adversarial divide (Mouffe 2005: 120). For citizens who feel passionately about a political issue, but lack the confidence and

knowledge to partake in rational debate, the deliberative model can end up privileging dominant groups in society who are able to articulate their thoughts in a rational manner (Wahl-Jorgensen 2007: 20). Mouffe (2005: 104) however argues that it is important for citizens to acknowledge that any consensus in society is a provisional form of hegemony predicated upon some form of exclusion. Thus by realising the potential of these passionate voices, groups have a better opportunity to transform existing power relations and establish a new counter hegemony (Engel 2006: 198).

Despite the criticism of the deliberative model, its framework is highly applicable to the core of this study. Its philosophy, according to Baym (2010: 118), is advocated by *TDS* and it was also the central message advocated by the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. This is because the show regularly calls for a more civil and cooperative approach to the nation's dialogue because it believes that the political and media world should be comprised of individuals engaged in reasoned discussion (2010: 119). It is only by practicing a cooperative discourses that society will be able to reach a consensual notion of what Stewart deems the 'common good' (Ibid). Given the criticisms aimed at various models and subsidiaries of democratic theory discussed thus far, it is of interest to this study to examine how the deliberative model was communicated by the event's organisers and whether it was in any way implemented. This is particularly important, as Niemeyer (2011: 104) argues that current approaches of deliberative democracy have had relatively little impact on wider political discourse or political action. Furthermore, they tend to only work on a smaller scale because of the inherent difficulties in scaling up deliberative practices (Ibid). This certainly raises questions about the rally and its ability to effectively implement its core message when it was a large scale event attended by over 250,000 people.

2.6 Conclusion
This chapter has discussed and evaluated the theoretical practices and frameworks of democracy and citizenship that are significant to this study of hybrid satire and the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. It has realised that central to the functioning of democracy is the role of the citizen and the integral and active role they play in the formation of government, whether it be through 'thick' or 'thin' demonstrations. Important to this practice however, are notions of rationality, equality and unity that enable citizens to listen to alternative view points as well as communicating their own ideas soundly and coherently. While these were points echoed by philosophers and political theorists

such as Rousseau, Mill, Habermas and Christiano, critiques of their theoretical frameworks have demonstrated their limitations in terms of citizen access and rational deliberation. Other scholars (Fraser 1992, Deluca & Peeples 2002, Marcus 2002, Mouffe 2005/2001) have expanded upon the work of these theorists and what democratic participation entails. While the approaches advocated by these scholars are not without fault, they illustrate how political participation can become more inclusive of alternative groups and how deliberation has moved beyond Habermas' rational approach. This finding relates specifically to the role of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and how this alternative satirical platform could potentially encourage new audiences to become involved in political participation by supporting its civility message.

When discussing terms such as media and democracy, it is also necessary to mention the media and the fundamental role they have in the formation and advancement of democracy and citizenship. Contemporary citizenship however is in steady decline, and according to Blumler and Gurevitch (1995: 212), Putnam (1995) and McChesney (2003), the news media are predominately to blame for this drop in political participation. The following chapter seeks to examine this debate by studying the role and evolution of the news media. Central to this chapter will be an exploration of the political, commercial and technological changes that have taken place and how this has impacted on news output and citizenship practice.

Chapter 3: The State of Political Journalism & Citizenship

Introduction

The previous chapter examined the practices of both citizenship and democracy, and how these concepts can enable and encourage citizen participation in the political process. It also highlighted how the news media are central to the democratic process in that they should actively encourage the formation of an informed citizenry. According to Jon Stewart, in his rally invitation, and countless media scholars (Blumler & Gurevitch 1995, McChesney 2003, 2012), some sections of the media have gradually abandoned their democratic role. It has been argued that this is largely due to commercial and economic imperatives that have led to the infiltration of partisanship, sensationalism and popular culture in news reporting. This chapter will therefore explore the evolution of broadcast news since the late 18th century to see how these changes have impacted, not just on news content, but on citizen engagement with news and political participation.

Given that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was chiefly concerned with partisan and sensationalist news and the effect this was having on the nation's political dialogue, particular attention will be paid to these specific areas. The latter sections of the chapter will examine the democratising abilities of both partisan news and the infiltration of popular culture, which scholars such as Street (1997, et al 2013), Mutz (2006), Sobieraj & Berry (2011), Dilliplane (2011) and Temple (2006) have argued encourages engagement with politics and political participation. This will be followed by a discussion of how these shows have become destructive to the premise of fourth estate journalism and deliberative democracy.

The last chapter concluded that the media play a vital role in creating and sustaining an informed citizenry. It is the normative view then that the media should adhere to a set of responsibilities to enable citizenship and democracy to prosper. Street (2001: 253) sets out these responsibilities as follows:

> The media should inform citizens about their (prospective)
> representatives', reflect a range of ideas and views, subject those
> who act in the name of the people to scrutiny and finally, to
> provide a platform for citizens to publicize their concerns and
> claims.

The premise that journalists should operate under this framework is still very much in force today. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, a number of economic and technological changes have occurred in the news media industry which have reformed

news presentation and content, and raised questions about the media's ability to adhere to the responsibilities set out by John Street.

From its inception in the late 18th century and early 19th century, journalism practiced a highly partisan approach (McChesney 2003: 300), rather than a bipartisan or neutral position. The practice of partisan journalism has been characterised in two distinctly different ways. McChesney and Nichols (2005) for instance argue that is potentially damaging to the practice of fourth estate journalism because it can lead to untruths and propaganda in news reporting (McChesney & Nichols 2005). Pasley (2001) however, argues that a partisan press system has much to offer to a democratic society, but only as long as there are numerous well-subsidized media platforms providing a broad range of opinions. Hallin and Mancini (2004), in their seminal study in the field of international comparative media system research, identified both the positive and negative attributes of a partisan journalism model described by McChesney, Nichols and Pasley. Describing partisan journalism as the 'polarised pluralist model', Hallin and Mancini recognise its democratic down falls such as the lack of differentiation between the media and political institutions. They also highlight the benefits of this model in that it can encourage high levels of civic participation and a lively public sphere in which different views meet and contend through the mass media (Ibid). Returning to the partisan model of the late 18th century, it appears that the wealth of newspapers on offer could supply citizens with a wealth of different political opinions. However, access to such opinions began to diminish when the newspaper industry became more commercialised. This resulted in the monopolisation of the press and the shutting down of many publications that provided alternative viewpoints to news audiences (McChesney & Nichols 2005). The result was a less democratically responsible press who failed to provide readers with a diversity of viewpoints.

3.1 The Rise of Professional Journalism

In light of practices of the early commercialised model, a new era of 'professional journalism' emerged in the 20th century. Underpinning this approach was the premise

of balance and neutrality in news reporting as editors and reporters would, from there on in, would operate independently from newspaper owners and advertisers (McChesney & Nichols 2005). It was hoped that the absence of political and commercial bias would result in fact based stories that the public could trust (Ibid). The very concept of the professional era was not without its problems. The currency placed on neutrality and objectivity meant that journalists actively avoided stories that provided interpretation of facts and context to circumvent advocating a certain political or moral position (Schudson 2013: 159, 160). This was problematic because without the inclusion of context to support news stories, citizens would not be fully equipped with the background information to make a proper judgement on an event. Another issue, according to McChesney (2003: 304), was that the little contextualisation professional journalism provided would conform to official source consensus. Put simply, journalists would favour accounts of events by official sources, such as politicians or the police, rather than the general public. The issue with reliance upon official sources, argued by Hall et al (1977: 58, 59), is that they get to establish the definition of the story. More recent research on contemporary news practices might challenge Hall et al's argument as recent news events such as the Arab Spring demonstrate how the news media are becoming more reliant on unofficial sources thanks to the developments in technology and social media (See Hermida et al 2014: 479). Nevertheless, primary definer sources such as politicians and the police remain integral to the work of journalists so that they can help define a story or provide balance to other source accounts of events (See Schulenberg & Chenier 2014, Hickerson et al 2011). Returning to the premise of principle reliance on primary definers, this is problematic because it conflicts with the idea of journalistic independence, as Franklin (2003: 20) notes, that the more journalists and official sources co-operate, the more consensual the relationship becomes. Consequently, unlike the contemporary public sphere that has made room for unofficial sources, the professional era of journalism left little space for citizen to contribute their view points or definition of a particular event or story.

Despite the criticisms of the professional era, there were instances where journalistic detachment from media owners and official sources meant that they could concentrate their efforts on investigative journalism and holding powerful figures accountable.

News stories such as the un-sanitized coverage of the Vietnam War captured the reality of war that had not been experienced before. Initial coverage was overwhelmingly favourable, yet after the 1968 Tet Offensive, coverage became highly critical of the war effort. While other factors might have also been at work, it is believed that the coverage provided by renowned *CBS* journalist, Walter Cronkite, led to public dissatisfaction with the war and eventually to an end to America's involvement in the war (Schudson 1995: 22). Without the advent of professional journalism, the idea of complete journalistic independence would not have allowed reporters like Cronkite to expose the harsh realities of war to American citizens (Kellner 1990: 51).

The above examples of journalism practices used from the 18th century through to the mid-20th century illustrates their impact and influences on news content citizen learning. However, it is the changes and developments that occurred in the latter half of the 20th century onwards that are of concern in the remainder of this chapter. This revolution led to a vast array of changes in media content, but for the purpose of this study attention will be paid to the emergence of new styles of news programming, such as hybrid satire and partisan news shows. It also instigated a number of conflicting debates about the potential impacts these new formats would have on citizen learning and participation in the political process, some of which were central to the 'Rally to Restore Sanity's' core message.

The Fairness Doctrine was a policy set up by America's Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1934 to regulate the holders of broadcast licences and ensure that news content was fair and balanced, and 'in the public interest' (Kellner 1990: 35). In 1984, under the Reagan Administration, the power that the FCC held over broadcasters gradually lessened as its chief commissioner, Mark Fowler, undertook a major deregulation of the American broadcast system. This resulted in a more lenient arena for broadcasters to compete and succeed in. It also affected the way political stories were presented in the news, as broadcasters no longer had to conform to federally imposed rules of impartiality (Cushion 2012: 47). Nor did they have to adhere to the 'equal time rule', whereby broadcasters had to dedicate equal time to different political viewpoints (Kellner 1990: 64).

3.2 The Multi-Channel & Post-Network Era

Another major development in news programming during the 1980s was the emergence of cable news that was made possible after President Reagan's passing of the Cable Franchise Policy and the Communications Act of 1984. This period became known as the 'multi-channel era', as cable offered more channels and diversity in programming than ever before. As technology continued to develop and impact on the production of news, the post-network era closely followed. According to Geoffrey Baym (2010) and Amanda Lotz (2007), the post-network era functioned similarly to the multi-channel era, because both transformed the way audiences interacted with news. The post-network period in particular, was defined by new media and its ability to open up different styles and forms of both news and entertainment.

The consequent changes of the TV media environment were that the dominance of the three big network news channels (*NBC*, *CBS* & *ABC*) began to wane (Morris 2009: 73), as audiences migrated away from them by seeking out alternative sources of news and information that cable could offer them (Cushion 2012: 86, Lotz 2007). In turn, this led to the fragmentation of news audiences (Sobieraj & Berry 2011: 22) and according to Baym (2010: 171), "intense market competition vying for their attention". A wealth of media scholars (See Baym 2010: 171, van Zoonen 2005: 3, Corner and Pels 2003: 6) have identified that in order to remain significant and to compete for audience attention, news was re-crafted as 'infotainment', as popular culture became a part of political news reporting.

The term 'popular culture' connotes various definitions that characterise it as something that is mass produced and made available to a large number of people with the aim to make profit (Strinati 1995: 10, Street 1997: 1). Popular culture might also be characterised as consumer products such as computer games, music or toys. The news media can also fall under this definition of the popular, or what Fiske (1992) characterises as 'popular journalism' - "a narrative style linked to orality through its sensationalism, populism, scepticism and moralism, and through its incorporation of fictional and entertaining elements." This definition draws parallels with Baym's (2010: 3) definition of infotainment because it incorporates elements of entertainment and discussions relating to current affairs. It is the purpose of the 'infotainment' show then to broadcast information that will both inform and entertain the viewer. *TDS* certainly falls within this category as it embodies both informative and entertainment

based traits. Given that it is part of the main subject of this study, a more in depth analysis of the show is reserved for the following chapter. Nevertheless, parts of the discussion on popular culture that will follow are applicable to scholarly debates on *TDS*. A genre of news that epitomizes aspects of infotainment and that also benefitted from the abolition of the fairness doctrine, is that of partisan news programmes.

Partisan news is central to this study of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', as the entire premise of the event rested on the fact that this news format has controlled the nation's dialogue and amplified the divisions between left and right. The result is a country and political system that has become extremely polarised and which is preventing real political discussions and solutions from taking place. Despite *TDS's* attacks on partisan news, it too has been accused of practicing a liberal agenda, as Young and Tisinger (2006: 126) argue that it is a left-leaning show. Given that *TDS* operates under the guise of 'fake news', its affiliation to the left will not come under the same scrutiny that will be awarded to official partisan news programmes. Indeed, partisan news is very similar to traditional news programming because it reports the same newsworthy stories and features interviews and debate. Yet unlike traditional news, it does not abide by the rules of neutrality and objectivity. Instead, there is an emphasis on gimmickry, comment and opinion (Cushion & Lewis 2009: 132). Partisan news outlets have also benefitted immensely from the abolition of the Fairness doctrine, in that it has enabled them to pursue a highly politicised agenda. *Fox News*, for example, is known for its advocacy towards the Republicans, while channels such as *CNN* and *MSNBC* have more recently been associated with having a left-wing bias. Popular culture and sensationalism are also central to the production of partisan news as most show's tend to feature tabloid and celebrity based stories. This element of contemporary news programming will be explored in the following section.

3.3 Debating Infotainment & Popular Culture In News

The drastic changes in news production experienced since the multi-channel and post-network era brings with it questions surrounding legitimacy and the ability of the news media to properly educate and inform news audiences. Kellner (1990: 64) argues that prior to deregulation, the news media operated under the same rules associated with the professional journalism era - news was considered a democratizing tool and the broadcasters were public trustees. But according to Baym

(2010: 170, 171), since the multi-channel era and the infiltration of entertainment and popular culture in news, television networks have all but abandoned their aspirations for fulfilling a fourth estate role to inform viewers about the world or holding power to account. Kellner (1990: 67) and Hallin (1994: 177) concur, adding that the re-crafting of news led to a drastic reduction in hard news and public affairs programming, and a rise in popular tabloid cultures of partisan entertainment and sensationalist topics.

The evidence provided suggests that popular culture has had a detrimental effect on the democratic role of the news media. There are a number of reasons why scholars have firmly reached this conclusion. Popular culture is, after all, a text marketed for profit, and tends to follow a standardised and formulaic approach, which Strinati (1995: 10) argues "denies intellectual challenge". Indeed, this is an argument that has been aimed at television news content in particular and has been echoed by a variety of scholars. Bob Franklin (2003: 12) for example, asserts that in an attempt to keep audiences interested, infotainment news has had to adhere to a standardised format to keep audiences interested. Consequently, journalism has morphed into "McJournalism", which offers audiences a relentlessly dull, consistent and staple diet of news programming (Ibid). This staple diet is highlighted by McChesney (2004: 61) as sensationalism, with a focus on crime, sex, scandal and celebrity in order to capture the audience's attention. Coverage of political stories follows a similar formula in that the media focuses on exposing or embarrassing politicians (Lloyd 2004: 15, & McChesney 2004: 61). Also, despite the duty of care that the media have in properly informing citizens with all the facts during election time, it appears that campaign coverage is also subject to entertaining elements. National policies are often ignored or marginalised (Oates 2008: 94) in favour of coverage that concentrates on the 'hoopla' of the campaign. This includes focus on personality, potential gaffs and scandals, or horse race which concentrates on which party is ahead in the polls (Dahlgren & Sparks 1997: 12). The 'horse race' has become a popular way in which to frame campaign coverage, as Farnsworth et al (2013: 133) argues that it has come to dominate election coverage in recent years. This was certainly the case in the 2008 election, where 80% of election coverage was devoted to who was winning in the polls (Rogers 2012). Without equal coverage on the political positions and policies of the candidates, excessive horse race coverage may contribute to the political divide

that Jon Stewart speaks of in his rally invitation. News in this instance is more about who is winning, rather than which candidate can better serve the needs of the public.

The examples above suggest that contemporary journalism, with its inclusion of popular culture traits, is in a state of crisis. Habermas (1974) described an informed citizenry as a collective who rely on information, facts and rational argument for political sense making. Yet the contemporary media's thirst for ratings has resulted in a media system that is not living up to its democratic responsibilities because it often fails to provide audiences with important facts. The undesirable outcome of the news that follows this infotainment approach is a 'media spectacle'[3] that creates a citizenry that is uninformed, misguided and manipulated (van Zoonen 2005: 11). Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* thesis goes one step further, arguing that popular culture is detrimental to civic engagement, whether in the form of voting or general deliberation (Cited in Street et al 2013: 17). Neil Postman, another contributor to this field of research, has also made a similar assertion. On first inspection, his original thesis might be considered out-dated in the contemporary media landscape that relies on a multitude of media platforms. In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman (1985) argues that television's fixation with entertainment restricts and therefore damages how media messages are decoded by its audience. Moreover, he believes that entertainment makes content less serious, less relevant and less coherent (1985: 67-80). The consequence is that audiences are provided with information that gives them something to talk about, yet it does not lead to any meaningful action (1985: 68).

Thus far, this section has examined a series of arguments on the limitations of popular culture and its negative impact on citizen learning and political participation. Other scholars however have challenged this interpretation of infotainment news, because while these formats might exclude the usual characteristics associated with hard news reporting, their effects can be positive for citizen learning. Temple (2006: 257), for example, argues that the "so-called 'dumbing down' of news is an essential part of engaging audiences". This is because infotainment and popular culture can capture

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[3] Media spectacle is described by Kellner (2003: 1) as methods used by the media to seize audiences and to increase their power and profit.

audiences who are unresponsive to more conventional coverage of political issues (Ibid). Temple presents a valid argument because it is ignorant to assume that all citizens are interested in traditional or hard news programming - after all, people connect with media in different ways. Simons (2003: 17) and Bauman (1992: 14) concur; however, they relate the negative responses to popular culture in news as elite snobbery. Both assert that previously, intellectuals earned the "right to tell others" what to do by establishing "universal standards of morality and taste" (Ibid). This is an argument that draws parallels with the work of Bourdieu (1984: 7) who writes:

> The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar, venal, servile – in a word,
> natural enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture,
> implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be
> satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous,
> distinguished pleasers forever closed to the profane.

The standards of taste highlighted by these three scholars suggest that popular culture is an indicator of vulgarity or low intelligence, thus elites argue that it should be separated from more refined and intellectually stimulating cultural texts. Or, in the case of this study, that popular culture has no place in the realms of political news reporting. Such judgements of superiority however are redundant especially when elite intellectuals are often professional academics or highly educated individuals (Simons 2003: 174), therefore they are more likely than most people to engage with hard political news. This certainly reflects Bourdieu's (1984: 1) argument, that levels of cultural understanding and taste are markers of higher levels of education and class. In their criticism of popular culture, intellectuals are failing to acknowledge different publics who want to raise their political awareness, but not through highbrow political programming. Cottle (2001: 76) and Temple (2006: 267) add further weight to this argument, affirming that people of all ages and backgrounds use a variety of genres to make sense of the political world. This, coupled with the idea of fragmented audiences created by the advent of cable news, encouraged the broadcast media to become more inventive and democratic by reflecting the concerns and needs of the wider population, other than those expressed by the cultural elite.

This section has demonstrated how popular culture's emergence into news and public affairs is not necessarily an indicator of journalism and citizenship in crisis. Instead infotainment has made political news more accessible and inclusive to audiences who

are unresponsive to hard political news programming (Norris 2000: 13, 15). Infotainment and popular culture certainly have democratic value by helping inform audiences, but it can also be a suitable terrain for democratic participation too. Scholars including Norris (2000), Schudson (2009) and Street et al (2013) have recognised the potential in popular culture to encourage civic participation. Street in particular (1997 & et al 2013) has written extensively on this subject, where he attributes popular culture's ability to connect people together on an emotional level with like-minded individuals and communities, which can then be a source of political action.

The central theme in Street's et al work is that popular culture has the ability to connect citizens from local and distant locales together through a shared idea. Street raises a valid argument that can be applied to scholarly research on fandom and activism. Brough and Shresthova (2010), for example, characterise 'fandoms' as groups of individuals who are drawn together through interest-driven affiliations, thus forming a sense of collective or sub-cultural identity around shared tastes. While fan approaches to activism may not be political in the traditional sense (e.g. changing legislation or provoking social change), it does encourage forms of action, including lobbying for a content-related outcome, such as a programme staying on air or the promotion of social themes in programme content (Brough & Shresthova 2010, Ross 2008). The infusion of popular culture in both hybrid satire shows like *TDS* and in partisan news programmes might work in a similar fashion in that they bring audiences together who identify with the same political views or satirical jokes. Whether *TDS* in particular can inspire civic participation and action remains to be seen, but it is a question that will be explored later in this study. The remainder of this chapter explores the scholarly debates relating to partisan news specifically and its impact on citizen engagement with news and civic participation.

3.4 Debating Partisan News

As discussed earlier, the arrival of partisan news, courtesy of the multi-channel and post-network eras, has been a major success for the respective media conglomerates. No more so than *Fox News* who remains the highest rated news channel on cable TV. *Fox's* formula of opinion led emotive news has certainly captured the American public's attention. Thus in order to sustain their share of the market, since 2009 other cable news networks became noticeably more partisan in tone, adding ideological talk

show hosts to prime time TV slots (Cushion 2012: 91). According to Cushion and Lewis (2009: 132), this has led to the 'foxification' of television news. This term has come to encapsulate a series of news values that run counter to public service traditions, with the emphasis on sensationalism, a tabloid style and speculation, rather than factual reporting and, the main subject of this section: partisanship rather than balance and objectivity (Schiffers 2003, Rasberry 2005 cited in Cushion and Lewis 2009).

Motivations for Engagement with Partisan News

Engagement with partisan news platforms could in fact be a by-product of the multi-channel and post network era that has made news audiences gravitate towards more opinionated news. Prior to these changes, audiences were reliant on the network news' linear prime time schedules. Lotz (2007:35) states that the arrival of cable and other media news platforms has eroded the publics' reliance on the networks' linear schedule and thus its ability to operate as a mass medium. Today, audiences can watch the news on their own terms, whether it is via traditional news outlets, infotainment formats such as satire shows like *TDS,* or the partisan news programmes found on *Fox News* and *MSNBC*. Citizens then have more control than ever before because they have the opportunity to seek out a wealth of different news sources. Forgette and Morris (2005: 4) state that this has encouraged a 'news grazer' approach, where individuals check in on the news from time to time with no set pattern. In their study of news grazers, Pew Research Centre (2008) defined such individuals as people who tend to follow the news on television with their remote control in hand - 'flipping' to other channels when they become disinterested. This definition provides a negative impression of news grazers in that they have a fickle approach to news viewing because they flit from channel to channel when they become disinterested in a particular show. While this may be destructive to the democratic ideals of the informed citizen, it is a realistic picture of contemporary news audiences. Data gathered from Pew in 2004 for example found that 62% of American's consider themselves as TV news grazers (Forgette & Morris 2007: 91).

The choice and opportunities awarded to audiences in the post-network era suggest that the news grazer approach may actually be a more democratic and informative way in which to view news. According to Lotz (2007: 32), during the network era, news functioned as both a forum and ideological enforcer that cultivated a dominant

way of thinking amongst the masses. McChesney (2004: 303) and Herman and Chomsky (1994: 14), make a similar argument, adding that the media landscape operated under a formulaic and hegemonic news discourse characterised by media conglomerates, corporations and politicians. Therefore, the premise that audiences were encouraged to identify with the elite constructed meanings of news is certainly plausible, especially when network news was the dominant news source for audiences prior to the multi-channel and post-network age.

Although the contemporary media is still a corporate dominated industry, the post-network era has certainly limited the main news network's control over news communication, thus making it simpler for news grazers to access news from opposing viewpoints. Dahlgren (2009: 153) concurs, adding that this new era offers enhanced possibilities for citizens to gain political knowledge and access a broader range of ideas and debates. One area that news grazers are gravitating towards is partisan news. While its popularity has dwindled in recent years[4], audiences seem to identify with this style of news reporting, particularly Republican platforms and programmes such as *Fox News* and Rush Limbaugh's show on *Talk Radio*. The remainder of this chapter will show how there is a wealth of literature on partisan news that questions its democratising abilities due to its often slanted framing of news events. Nevertheless, consuming partisan news can be central to citizen engagement with politics. McChesney and Nichols (2005) contend that partisan news can be positive for democracy and citizen learning, as long as they have access to alternative opinions from other news sources. This is certainly the case in contemporary society, as audiences now have a wide variety of media and political viewpoints to choose from. Furthermore, evidence collected by Pew (2010) illustrates that despite opposing political beliefs, Americans are accessing news from different political sources. For example, 33% of *Fox News's* audience were Democrat, while 18% of *MSNBC's* audience were Republican. Of course, this example does present relatively low figures for news viewing, nonetheless it provides hopeful findings that some news audiences are actively seeking out alternative accounts of news to stay better informed.

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[4] Audience figures for cable, partisan news programmes found on networks such as CNN, MSNBC and Fox News have slipped substantially in the last 4 years (Pew Research 2010)

Engagement with partisan news from opposing political viewpoints is generally an exception to the rule. According to a 2009 Pew study, Republicans have, since 1998, continued to gravitate towards *Fox News*, while audience figures for more left-leaning cable channels was considerably higher for Democrats[5]. Rather than actively seeking out alternative viewpoints, it appears that audiences are in fact gravitating towards news that reflects their political outlook. Jonas et al (2005: 978) makes a very similar point, that when searching for news information, "people are often biased in favour of previously held beliefs and expectations". This has certainly been reflected in audience studies of selective media exposure, as Stroud (2007) and Dilliplane (2011) found that news audiences tend to consume media that shares their political predisposition, with cable news increasingly used as the go to medium.

While the choice offered by the post-network era may be one indicator of why citizens are actively seeking out news that reflects their political beliefs, another is developments in the practice of contemporary politics. For example, Corner and Pels (2003: 7) argue that, in the past, political parties tended to become centrist parties and reproduce the divisions of the political spectrum within themselves. This could explain why audiences have moved away from neutral news reporting to partisan news, whose opinions reflect the audiences' political thoughts and emotions. Baym (2010: 12, 170) concurs, adding that politicians have blurred the lines between left and right in an attempt to please and capture a large population of voters. Consequently, pundits have gained popularity because they have strong political and religious beliefs. It could be argued that partisan news spotted a gap in the news market and therefore adopted a 'populist' approach to challenge the neutral positions adopted by the news networks and political parties. This would certainly reflect the political outlook during the time of the multi-channel era and relaxation of the Fairness Doctrine. Jones (2005: 41) states that in this period, there was an appeal for 'commonsensical' ways of talking and thinking about politics, and a concurrent upsurge in populist anti-politics by a public that was finding the political arena repugnant. *Fox News* in particular has made a concerted effort to represent the needs of ordinary Americans and consequently adopted an advocacy journalism approach. In recent years, *Fox News's* former host, Glenn Beck, organised the 'Restoring

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[5] Democrat audiences made up 51% of CNN's audience, while only 18% of Republicans tuned in. Similarly 45% of MSNBC's audience identified themselves as Democrat, while only 18% of their audience was Republican (Pew 2009)

Honour' rally at the Lincoln Memorial in an attempt to raise funds for the Special Operations Warrior Foundation. Furthermore, the channel has been a keen advocate and promoter of the right-leaning Tea Party movement, because it provided the most positive coverage of the movement compared to other news networks (Boykoff & Laschever 2011: 351).

On the surface, the attempts used by partisan news to attract audiences and gain their trust and support certainly relates to the premise of the media practicing their fourth estate role. After all, it is the media that should represent the needs of the public and provide them with a platform in which to publicise their concerns and claims (Street 2001: 253). However, it is important to remember the constraints and rules that these programmes operate under: namely commercial imperatives that are ratings-driven. The populist and advocacy journalism approach then is not necessarily a sign of partisan news adopting a public sphere ethos. Instead it is used in an attempt to increase profit, secure audiences and support for the political party they are affiliated with. Critics have made a similar argument about *Fox's* endorsement of the Tea Party movement, in that it was merely an attempt to invigorate its support from America's most conservative and least liberal factions (*The Economist* 2010).

Thus far this section has discussed the motives behind people's engagement with partisan news programmes. Both the multi-channel and post-network eras provided citizens with opportunities to engage with news from a spectrum of diverse viewpoints. As a result, some audiences have adopted a news grazer approach, where they seek out a range of alternative voices from oppositional partisan programmes. Meanwhile, some audiences engage with this platform because it supports and reflects their political views. The remainder of this chapter is concerned with the latter - selective exposure to partisan news and what impact this has on citizen learning and its wider effects on civic participation.

Much of the research on partisan news suggests that it is hindering citizen learning. This is due to its absence of journalistic values, where emphasis is placed on providing audiences with balanced and accurate information so that they are fully informed. Jones suggests that "pundits who work on partisan news shows operate at the other end of the scale… they are lap dogs of the powerful because of their

cheerleading and emotionally manipulative approaches to news reporting" (2010: 182). Jones (2010: 45) goes on to characterise their role and actions as somewhat dangerous, because "pundits tend to spout opinions on issues that they generally have little knowledge of as reporters" (Ibid). This argument and those highlighting pundits' cheerleading of political parties certainly have relevance to *Fox News* in particular and their reporting of the Iraq War. A study carried out by Pew found that of their coverage of the Iraq war in 2004, 73% of the reporting contained opinion from pundits and journalists (Kurtz 2005). The prevalence of opinion over fact had a detrimental impact on the *Fox News* audience and their knowledge of the war. This was evident in Kull's et al (2003) study that examined people's knowledge on politics and public affairs, which found that *Fox News* viewers, more than any other station, were the most misinformed. For example, when viewers were asked questions on the Iraq war, the misperception rate for *Fox News* audiences was 45%, with other partisan news channels like *MSNBC* achieving a much lower figure of around 11%.

Kull's study illustrates how opinion led information is misinforming the public about key news events. This is a major limitation of partisan news because it undermines the practices and values of journalism that advocates a public service ethos traditionally associated with citizen understanding of events (Cushion & Lewis 2009: 132, Schudson 1995). The uses of opinion and misinformation are also likely to impact on citizen participation in the political process too. This is because without an accurate understanding of political debates that are central to participation in the public sphere it will become increasingly difficult for citizens to reach a well-informed opinion.

Polarisation of Audiences & Cable News
One of the biggest issues relating to selective exposure of partisan news is that its audiences are becoming increasingly polarised in their political disposition (Stroud 2007: 2). Furthermore, depending on what channel the audience is watching, there is a cultivation of either an explicitly Republican or Democrat 'window on the world' (Cushion 2012: 105). One example of how polarisation is achieved is documented in Conway et al's (2007: 197) study on *The O'Reilly Factor,* where they found propaganda techniques, such as name calling and the framing of a battle between good and evil, were used to emphasise the divide between left and right. For example, illegal immigrants, terrorists and those who shared a political leaning to the left were portrayed as the evil villains - yet the Republican Party and its advocates were

characterised as heroic with virtuous intentions (Ibid). It is of no surprise then that audiences with selective viewing habits might form an increasingly polarised and negative view of the groups that are attacked on partisan news.

The news media is also subjected to the same treatment, as partisan news shows have collectively worked to undermine the credibility of their rivals (Cushion 2012: 89). Jamieson and Capella (2008: 244) contend that in their attempt to secure audiences, partisan news channels are encouraging distrust in other media organisations by casting them as untrustworthy. Their approach has certainly impacted on audience viewing habits of these shows, as Republicans are increasingly migrating towards the *Fox News* channel and away from other news sources because of the channel's affiliation to the party (Pew Research 2009). The survey found a similar trait in Democrat leaning audiences, who are increasingly leaning towards more liberal cable channels such as *MSNBC* and *CNN* (Ibid). The implications attached to selective viewing habits goes far beyond polarising the opinions of its audience against opposing political parties and groups. It can also have serious repercussions for deliberative participation that will be discussed below.

In his framework of the public sphere, Habermas (1974) argued that access to a variety of viewpoints and the practice of rational discussion are integral to the practice of deliberative and informed debate. The deliberative model of democracy is based on similar requirements because, according to Dahlgren (2009: 88) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007: 20, 25), in order for political deliberation to be successful, it is essential that participants have access to alternative opinions that may challenge and change their own. Moreover, it will enable citizens to deepen their understanding of arguments for and against their preferred views, and yield more informed and tolerant political attitudes and behaviours (Mutz 2008: 283 cited in Dillplane 2011: 311). Selective exposure to partisan news can be accused of undermining this ethos and consequently, people's ability to partake in the deliberative process. Scholars including Jamieson and Capella (2008: 246) and Mutz & Martin (2001) have raised the same argument, that by not being open to oppositional viewpoints, this could result in deliberative compromise and discussion becoming a thing of the past. This has implications not just for micro demonstrations of political deliberation such as discussions with colleagues, family or local level politics like town hall meetings, but macro level

politics too. Stroud (2007: 3) for example argues that without shared priorities, allocation of limited resources such as time and money become difficult. Partisan exposure therefore may stunt the ability of government officials to make political choices that are responsive to all the public's needs. The development of partisan stalemate was also of chief concern to Jon Stewart, as the premise of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' rested on the idea of creating a more civil and bipartisan approach to political problem solving.

While the post-network era offers news audiences more choice than ever before, it appears that its by-product - partisan news – has become more detached and disconnected from the premise of bi-partisan deliberation and alternative viewpoints. TV alone however cannot be held solely responsible for the increase in polarised audiences. In Arceneaux and Johnson's (2013: 90) study, they found that when polarised audiences were exposed to competing arguments on cable news, this did not cancel out the effect of the initially received arguments. Instead it reinforced their pre-existing attitudes and caused them to be more resistant to opposing viewpoints (Ibid). The results, then, might not be a result of engagement with partisan news alone, but linked to the deeply held beliefs of these individuals. Bishop and Cushing (2008) come to a similar conclusion in their book *In the Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like Minded America is Tearing us Apart*. They argue that television news cannot be exclusively blamed for the ideological and polarised relationship viewers are increasingly forging with news programmes and channels. They state that community, politics and religion are also contributing factors (Cited from Cushion 2012: 103). While partisan news cannot be held solely responsible for the rise in citizen polarisation, it can be argued that its existence has made it that much harder to achieve bipartisan solutions.

While there is a considerable amount of evidence that argues about the antidemocratic traits of partisan news, other scholars have challenged this view. Mutz (2006), Sobieraj and Berry (2011) and Dilliplane (2011) believe that identification with partisan platforms can actually encourage civic participation. Again, this has been attributed to the changes brought about by the post-network era that created niche programming and audiences. It appears that partisanship functions in the same way as popular culture in news programming - bringing likeminded audiences together that

share the same political affiliations and ideologies. Lotz (2007: 43) holds a similar view on the post-network era, arguing that it caters to narrow-cast groups that share particular cultural affinities or tastes. According to Mutz (2006: 134), while these homogenous networks can polarise audiences, they can also have mobilising characteristics because they encourage citizens to have more intense views. The knock on effect is that strongly held positions are generally a prerequisite citizen mobilisation and a willingness to disturb political stability (Ibid).

These traits were apparent during the rise of the Tea Party Movement from 2009 to 2012. Membership and activism flourished because of people's shared concerns for the economy, the jobs market and the belief that they were taxed too highly (Condon 2012). In their news analysis of the Tea Party movement, Boykoff and Lashever (2011: 355) found that the group had been highly successful in defining their aims within the media. Furthermore, the collective weight of the movement impacted heavily on the 2010 midterm election, as the media credited them for the electoral success of the Republican Party (Ibid). In recent years the movement's success has dwindled somewhat, which has been blamed, in part, on their policy demands and the pressure they put on Republican leadership which disrupted negotiations on the federal budget (Sheffield 2013). Sheffield uses the term 'negotiation', a deliberative trait which was largely absent not just from the Tea Party's stance on the Affordable Health Care Act, but also the discussions between Republicans and Democrats that resulted in a stalemate and government shutdown. Again this illustrates one of the major limitations of partisanship, because while it may encourage civic participation, it is missing a number of key elements that are essential for a healthy democracy and for deliberative action to prosper. Mutz and Martin (2001) and Dillplane 2011: 302) argue that without exposure to different views, partisan citizens will never fully comprehend the opposing side's predicament. Consequently, this leads to less tolerance and an inability to reach collective compromise. This of course was the main premise and instigator of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', as Stewart advocated a more civil approach to political deliberation so that bipartisan solutions could be achieved.

3.5 Conclusion

What can be gathered from the collection of findings in this chapter is that the media revolution experienced in the late 1980's led to a major transformation in news

production and content. The result was an explosion of new television channels that offered new styles and formats of news that catered to a wealth of niche audiences. A consequence of the need to secure audiences and the abolition of the Fairness doctrine were new formats of news that became increasingly partisan and infotainment-led.

This chapter has also debated the merits of both popular culture and partisans traits in news programming. Scholars including Street (1997, et al 2013), Mutz (2006), Sobieraj and Berry (2011), Dilliplane (2011), Temple (2006) and Norris (2001) have considered the democratising potential of both infotainment and partisan news because they encourage engagement with news and politics. Furthermore, they inspire emotional attachment that brings like-minded communities together, which can result in acts of political participation.

Much of the research however condemns the use of partisanship and popular culture in news programming, because it illustrates the media's abandonment of its fourth estate role (Kellner 2001, Hallin 1994, Franklin 2003). Both partisan and infotainment traits in news programming have also been considered detrimental to civic engagement (Putnam 1995, Postman 1985). But it is partisan news that has come under the most scrutiny because it misinforms and polarises audiences. The result is a form of news that is destructive to the premise of the fourth estate media and deliberative democracy.

As more audiences gravitate towards partisan news its impact may become ever more destructive particularly when news channels recognise the economic benefits of switching to a 'foxified' reporting style. Thus contrary to the idea that the post-network era has provided a plethora of choice and diversity in news, Cushion (2012: 103) argues that the infiltration of partisan news has narrowed the diversity of voices by promoting mostly vitriolic, sensational and polarised approaches to television journalism. Cushion's argument certainly has resonance with the core message of *TDS's* 'Rally to Restore Sanity' that criticised the media's increasingly emotional and polarised approach to news reporting. The following chapter then will examine the role of hybrid satire like *TDS*, its role and place in the world of journalism and whether it can contribute to citizen learning and engagement with the political process.

Chapter 4 – The Daily Show: Journalistic & Democratic Connections

Introduction

The previous chapter, in part, examined some of the major limitations of the contemporary media environment such as the commercialisation of news, increasing levels of partisan practice in U.S journalism and the potential negative impacts this had on civic participation. It is the intention of this chapter to explore another alternative platform to emerge in the post-network era; *The Daily Show* - a hybrid satirical programme that adopts humour and political critique in its reporting style.

This chapter will demonstrate why audiences, the media and scholars are increasingly turning to *TDS* as a trusted and informative news source by examining the appeal of hybrid satire and a number of its journalistic traits. A key aspect to the analysis of *TDS* is the impact this programme may potentially have on audience engagement with politics and civic participation. The remainder of this chapter will consider the scholarly arguments within this field of research and how this may contribute to our understanding of how *TDS* audiences engage with the main subject of this study - the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'.

4.1 *TDS* - Infotainment with a Difference

As discussed previously, infotainment is defined as broadcast material which intends to both entertain and inform (Oxford Dictionary 2014). Thussu's (2010: 364) definition is almost identical, as he describes it as an explicit genre-mix of 'information' and 'entertainment' in news and current affairs programming. These definitions clearly resonate with the characteristics of *TDS*, particularly in relation to Feldman et al's (2008: 402) definition of the show:

> *TDS* is a nightly news parody show…each episode offers a satiric interpretation of politics and current events, in which host and faux news anchor Jon Stewart mocks those who both make and report the news. Each show also includes an interview with a celebrity guest culled from the entertainment, political or media world. The interview line-up balances more serious guests with entertainers promoting their most recent fare.

Feldman et al's definition of *TDS*'s stylistic approach illustrates why the show is considered part of the infotainment genre, because it embodies both informative and entertainment based traits. When considering audience responses to the programme

and much of the academic research discussed in this chapter, the evidence illustrates that *TDS* is far too complex a programme to categorise as merely infotainment. Naturally, it does share similar traits to other infotainment media, because it also features celebrity, personality, emotion, fast paced visual action and sensationalist headlines - more often than not delivered by an anchor (van Zoonen 2005, Thussu 2010: 364). This chapter will argue that this is where the similarities end, thus it is improper to categorise and criticise satirical news shows like *TDS* in the same way as other programmes that belong to the infotainment genre. As discovered in the last chapter, a number of scholars consider infotainment media to be destructive to the democratic process because it undermines public journalism and public service broadcasting (Thussu 2010: 363). Rowe (2010: 350) reaches a similar conclusion about its impact on audiences; arguing that it degrades the public sphere and erodes the conditions for a robust democracy of well informed, vigilant and demanding citizens. Indeed *TDS* is also subject to the same criticisms which will be discussed later in his chapter.

TDS is a unique platform however, because it hybridises many of the traits found in other infotainment formats. For the most part, *TDS* adopts these characteristics in order to satirise and highlight the spectacle and excessiveness of many contemporary infotainment news shows. Unlike traditional news shows and comedy programmes, *TDS* blurs the boundaries between these genres which, Russell (2011: 106) argues, has never before taken place - but in doing so it is creating a "remix of the discourse that takes place within these genres". This merging of different genres can again be attributed to the post-network era and what Baym (2010: 18) labels 'discursive integration', which has resulted in the fluidity of content and form in television news programming. He writes:

> Discourses of news, politics, entertainment and marketing have grown deeply inseparable; the language, styles and practices of each have lost their distinctiveness and are being remolded and melded into previously un-thought combinations. For some this is a narrative of crisis, but the contemporary media environment also contains the potential for a worthwhile rethinking of discursive styles and standards that occasionally opens spaces for significant innovation. (2005: 6)

Baym's argument certainly has validity in relation to *TDS,* because its mix of satire and political critique presents an inventive way in which to present news and inform audiences. While the critical and journalistic aspects of *TDS*'s reporting approach will form the basis of much of the discussion in this chapter, its use of satire is central to the show's appeal and to its success as a critically engaging news format.

Before discussing *TDS* in more detail it is worth noting the significance of satire as a potent method of communication. Grey et al (2009: 12) for instance, describe it as a powerful genre that has the ability to attack and pass judgement on the powerful while doing so in a playful and entertaining manner. Satire however is not a contemporary method of communication; its origins stem from Ancient Greece and the work of Aristophanes, Archilocus and Juvenal. These play writes and poets used satire as a way of criticising war and to highlight social problems (1940: 32). Over time the platform in which satire was communicated began to change, it was longer the domain of poetry and theatre but also cartoons and literature. Cartoons in particular were used by the likes of Thomas Nast in the 16th century to communicate political issues and transgressions to illiterate citizens (Trivedi 2008). Nast was particularly successful in his use of satirical cartoons as they helped lead to the incarceration of New York politician William Tweed for political corruption and theft of tax payers' money (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2014).

Satire's ability to create substantial political change however has not been repeated since. In most cases satire has been used to draw attention to social ills. This was certainly true of writers such as Jonathan Swift and George Orwell. Swift in his satirical pamphlet *A Modest Proposal* spoke on behalf of the citizens by using irony and hyperbole to vent his disgust at wealthy Irish politicians who did nothing to help the impoverished people of Ireland in the 18th century. The satirical work of Orwell in his book *Animal Farm* also became a defining moment for the genre as it opened up the eyes of the English speaking West to the true nature of the Soviet regime (Yemenici 1997). Most importantly his essay *Politics and the English Language* broadened the capabilities of the satire genre because it encouraged his readers to become active readers of politics who should challenge and not take political news at face value (Sheldon 1991: 393). Most satirical texts and platforms have followed a similar structure ever since. This is true of 1960s satire in the form of *That Was the*

Week that Was and other tests such as *Private Eye*, Faux documentaries such as *Brass Eye* and animated cartoons such as *The Simpsons* and *South Park*. While the styles of satirical communication may differ in these media platforms their aims remain close to the definition of satire in that they attempt to highlight social issues and elite transgressions through use of humour, sarcasm and parody.

Returning to the subject of satire in contemporary Western society, the evidence above demonstrates how the genre appears to compliment the critical aspects of fourth estate journalism, particularly news reporting that scrutinises political and social issues. Satire functions in a similar way, as Kercher (2006: 15) argues that it is humour with a social purpose that is spurred by anger relating to serious political and moral concerns. Satire then might critique and raise issues that are of chief concern to the general public, but unlike the news media, it communicates these issues through humour. Gray et al's (2009) definition also reveals the similar practices of both journalism and satire. For example, satire is powerful because it has the ability to attack power in a playful and entertaining way, which makes it a potent form of political communication. Freud (1960: 149) has also advocated the benefits of humour as a method of communication, because it makes the aggressiveness of criticism against people in exalted positions easier to digest.

The points raised by the above scholars go some way to explaining why hybrid satire programmes differ to most political news shows because of its mix of comedy and, at times, serious political commentary. It addition, they might also indicate why *TDS* has become more successful than most cable news channels. The Neilson ratings indicate that *TDS* averages 2.3 million viewers, but the highest rated news channel, *Fox News*, averaged only 1.85 million (*The Daily Mail* 2011). Its popularity has resonated particularly with young people, as studies carried out by Pew (2010, 2012) found that of the regular viewers of the show, 69% were younger than 50, and 50% were aged between 18 and 49. Jon Stewart's role as lead anchor and satirical commentator on the show has certainly proved popular with its audiences, as a 2009 *Time Magazine* poll voted him 'the most trusted newsman in America'. This is a position normally reserved for conventional news reporters such as *NBC*'s Brian Williams and *CBS's* Katie Couric (Cushion 2012).

The popularity of *TDS* among the young demographic can be attributed to a number of cultural factors, although its use of comedy and entertainment is a chief contributor. A number of studies have found that young people are tuning out of traditional news in favour of alternative platforms. Graber (2001: 442) found that young people have been saturated with negative news most of their adolescent and adult years, which has left them with a disdain for news and politicians. This finding was also replicated in Buckingham's (2000: 5) study of students in the USA, where he found a shared lack of enthusiasm for television news because of its increasing sensationalism, commercialisation and its excessive and graphic coverage of crime and disasters. Mindich's (2005: 46) study drew similar conclusions from students and young professionals whose distaste for the mainstream news was a result of its bias and packaging. These studies suggest that young people have grown tired of the packaging of partisan and traditional news programming, but that is not to say that they have abandoned news and politics altogether. Instead, many are seeking out alternative platforms of news that captures their interest. Katz (1993: 130) echoed this argument in his *Rolling Stone* article, adding that young people are more appreciative of the 'breadth and variety of information' provided by news platforms available in the post-network era. Katz (1993) goes on to argue that they prefer a more 'informal' and 'ironic' style and have a broader definition of news than mainstream journalism. Wolf (2010) concurs as he believes that young people identify with news that catches their interest because it is personally relevant, dramatic and entertaining. What these arguments suggest is that mainstream media outlets are failing to serve the needs and interests of younger American audiences. As a result, younger people have abandoned mainstream news outlets for alternative news sources (Baym 2010: 2). Consequently, *TDS* has embraced the role of alternative news source by combining news, comedy and irony to cater to the younger demographics needs.

Concerns have been raised about the type of audience that watch *TDS* because of its reliability as a source of political information. *Fox News* host Bill O'Reilly voiced his unease to Jon Stewart, arguing "you've got stoned slackers watching your dopey show every night, and they can vote" (AP 2004). By associating *TDS* audiences with drugs, O'Reilly is suggesting that they are immoral and lacking in political knowledge and judgement, thus they are incapable of being reliable citizens. Interestingly, a number of studies have refuted O'Reilly's statement, instead *TDS* audiences are in

fact better educated that those who watch network and cable news (Pew 2008, 2012, Feldman & Goldwaite-Young 2008). According to Goldwaite-Young and Tisinger's (2006) study, this makes *TDS* audience more politically informed as they are more likely to know the issue positions and backgrounds of politicians than people who do not watch hybrid satire. Similarly, a study carried out by Pew (2008) also found that *TDS* viewers are highly informed individuals, but that the show is not their lone source of news. It is unclear why these audiences utilise multiple news sources, although reasons may include their level of education, knowledge of alternative opinions on news events, news grazing or to understand the irony at work in hybrid satire. Caufield (2008: 15) agrees with the latter assertion that the satirical elements of *TDS* demand that viewers be more engaged in the experience of learning about politics. Thus in order to understand the jokes audiences feel it is necessary to seek out stories from other news platforms. Although this argument suggests that *TDS* is an accompaniment to political learning, Feldman et al (2011: 39) found that the relationship between satirical news use and attentiveness is most pronounced among those with the least amount of formal education. Thus not all *TDS* audiences utilise multiple news sources to stay informed; ultimately though, it may encourage these audiences to do so in the future. This is consistent with Baum's (2003) 'gateway hypothesis', which suggests that by making political information more accessible to viewer's, hybrid satire can promote subsequent attention to news around specific topics.

Another concern about *TDS* and its audience is highlighted by Goldwaite-Young & Tisinger (2006: 126) and Pew (2012), who argue that the politically liberal nature of the show has led to a largely liberal audience following. Studies carried out by Crowter (2007) and Baum (2003: 186) have certainly highlighted the partisan nature of the show, as Jon Stewart provides comedic foils towards conservative guests, yet treats liberal guests with a more friendly approach. Furthermore, Morris' (2009) study concluded that *TDS*'s reporting approach had impacted on its audience's perceptions of the major political parties. Watchers of *TDS* became increasingly hostile toward the then President Bush and Vice-President Cheney, while attitudes toward John Kerry and John Edwards [Democrats] remained consistent (2009: 99). The last chapter explored the negative implications of engagement with partisan selected exposure because it can polarise audiences, influence their political opinions and affect their

ability to partake in deliberative discussions (Jamieson & Capella 2006). Despite these findings, in recent years *TDS* has become more critical of the Obama administration, despite its advocacy for his presidential campaign (Harris 2010 Cited in Cushion 2012: 106), which undermines the premise that the show swings heavily to the left. In addition, while 45% of Stewart's audience might be left-leaning, a recent study by Pew (2012) found that an additional 41% of viewers consider themselves as Independents. This finding might actually be linked to the points discussed earlier, that many *TDS* viewers seek out a range of news sources in order to understand the satirical elements at work in the show. While this research weakens claims of high levels of partisanship in *TDS* and claims of polarisation in its audience, it is still an area of research that has been relatively untouched, thus it would certainly benefit from further investigation in the future.

Returning to discussions on the success of *TDS* brand, it appears that the show's ability to blur the lines of journalism and satire have proved popular, not just with audiences, but with the journalistic community too. Of course, some journalists have voiced their discomfort with Jon Stewart's actions and infringement into journalism (Carlson & Peifer 2013: 7). However, this is because they value the practices and norms associated with traditional journalism. Consequently, they are keen to defend their role as the 'appropriate' agents who précis over public discourse and invoke concerns that the mixing of entertainment and journalism has negative consequences for journalistic authority (Winch 1997). In recent years, other parts of the journalistic community have re-evaluated their thoughts on hybrid satire. This was evident in the Teneboim-Weinblatt (2009: 433) study, where she found that the journalism industry evolved their framing of Stewart from an outsider to the journalistic community, to eventually having fully fledged membership. Acknowledgement and respect from the journalistic community has certainly increased the credibility of the *TDS* as a legitimate and influential political platform. During the 2004 primary season, all nine of the Democratic presidential candidates visited *TDS* and the show was invited to cover both the 2004 Democratic and Republican National Conventions (Feldman 2007: 10). Renowned journalists Bill Moyers (2011) and Maureen Dowd have expressed their admiration for the show, detailing its influential role in political news and comparing Jon Stewart to respected journalists like Edward R Murrow and Walter Cronkite (Baym 2010: 5). This accumulation of evidence demonstrates again, how the

show has successfully attempted to redefine the conventions of journalism by throwing comedy into the mix. Consequently, this formula has raised the show's symbolic capital with the journalism industry and with the audiences who use it as a go-to political news source.

4.2 Satire that Serves the Public Sphere

As a popular and respected fixture in the contemporary media landscape, the remainder of this chapter will examine what elements of *TDS* programming have led people to conclude that the show acts as an informative and critical news source. Much of the scholarly evidence on the show highlights its ability to serve democracy and aid the public sphere through a multitude of approaches. The first approach is that *TDS* is a more accessible platform for citizen engagement with news. This was an argument that was explored in the last chapter - that infotainment is not necessarily an indicator of the 'dumbing-down' of news, but an essential part of capturing audiences who are unresponsive to conventional news programming (Temple 2006). It has been argued though that it is *TDS*'s use of comedy in particular that has become central to creating a comfortable environment for political engagement to flourish. Baumgartner (2008: 293) for example asserts that humour-based infotainment can actually be "an essential element to democracy" because it can invigorate political interest. Thus unlike other infotainment news formats that are restricted by journalistic values, shows like *TDS* tend to win audiences over with their "blunt and honest" reporting approach (Ibid). Hairman (2007) concurs, adding that *TDS*'s humoristic conventions make political news more meaningful, since it unpacks much of the spin and empty rhetoric espoused by the political and media classes. *TDS* offers audiences a unique experience in comparison to conventional news reporting because it uses humour and honest rhetoric, which defies the conventions of traditional journalism by speaking in a language that audiences can identify with.

The accessibility of *TDS* can be easily challenged, particularly when its audiences are identified as highly educated individuals in comparison to audiences who watch conventional news programming (Pew 2008). Less educated individuals may feel intimidated by the show's use of sarcasm and irony, because in order to understand the joke, in most cases, the audience must have the required background knowledge. Caufield (2008: 14) concurs that it is possible that someone could be regularly exposed to satire and simply not get the social critique because he/she does not

understand it. This argument is given further validity when considering Johnson's et al (2010: 412) study of satire interpretation in audiences, which found that many subjects misinterpreted the satirical meaning of texts, or they found no real message in its communicative style. Although *TDS* has the potential to produce new forms of knowledge that challenge the mainstream media's official account, the evidence here suggests that it can also hinder audience interpretation of news events and become an inaccessible platform for citizen engagement with news. This is something that Baumgartner and Morris (2011: 73) discovered in their study of *TDS'*s audience. For example, those who relied only on *TDS* for their news fix were evidently less confident in discussing politics and current affairs than those who used both regular news and hybrid satire. Exposure to *TDS* alone then is not a reliable way in which to learn about political and social issues. Instead these findings suggest that adopting a news grazer approach may actually be the most resourceful way in which to acquire political knowledge. This is because watching regular news exposes audiences to the most newsworthy events, some of which may be missing from *TDS*. Exposure to a wealth of news sources as well as *TDS* will provide audiences with a vast array of knowledge to help them function as well informed citizens in a democracy.

To properly serve their democratic role as the fourth estate, the news media should act in the name of the people (Street 2001: 253). This is an approach that *TDS* has adopted, as both Day (2011: 10) and Jones (2010: 238) argue that Jon Stewart plays the role of the convincing citizen surrogate working on behalf of citizens by airing their concerns in the public sphere. There is certainly a bond between satire texts and its audience, as it is a genre that arises when society is confronted with serious social issues. This works particularly well in the contemporary news environment where scholars and *TDS* itself have identified that the commercial and political imperatives of news take precedence over informing and supporting the democratic needs of the general public (See McChesney 2003, Herman & Chomskey 1994). Jones (2010: 238) acknowledges this argument, adding that a trusted bond has been formed between the satirist and the audience, because *TDS* maintains a degree of authenticity and because it is not so closely aligned with the 'manufactured' realities that the news media construct. The 'bond' Jones refers to can also be explained by the frameworks of comedy theory. Freud (1960: 149), in his analysis of humour, argues that jokes offer individuals a break from the strains of society and an alternative platform in which to

air grievances. This is because jokes make aggressiveness possible against persons who exercise authority (Ibid). Bakhtin makes a similar argument, suggesting that reflection, analysis and ridicule of social norms enacted by humour is a necessary devise to ward off elitist hypocrisy (Cited in Gray et al 2009: 10). The theoretical ideas put forward by Freud and Bakhtin shed further light on how the *TDS* is able to serve a democratic purpose by fighting the audience's corner. This is a finding which again explains why audiences identify with and gravitate towards hybrid satire, because it uses humour to hold the powerful accountable on behalf of the American public.

For Habermas, validity and truthfulness are required elements of communication (Baym 2010: 118). They are also central requirements of fourth estate journalism to ensure that audiences are made fully aware of the facts surrounding a story so that they develop an informed opinion. This approach is evident in *TDS* reporting style, as it attempts to present a more detailed and alternative perspective to events than those found in mainstream news. Jones (2010: 235) concurs, adding that *TDS* highlights political and social issues that are not raised within mainstream television, such as meaningful assessments of politics or critiques of how the news rarely serves the public good. First this is achieved by the show's attempts to encourage audiences to actively engage with the shows deconstruction of hegemonic discourses. Jones and Baym (2012: 6) concur, arguing that satire rejects the verticality, linearity and 'window of the world' view of contemporary news. Similarly, Gray et al (2009: 11) add that while traditional news forms postulate politics as something to learn, satire challenges news consumers to examine, question and play with politics, rather than simply consume it as truth.

Indeed, there are countless examples that support the premise that hybrid satire encourages citizens to question and reassess the news they consume. This was true for *The Colbert Report's* Super-Pac campaign, which offered audiences a simplified way in which to understand election campaign finance by satirising and drawing attention to the hypocrisy and legal loopholes involved. The impact of the campaign on audience knowledge was extremely positive. Lamarre (2013: 394) found in her study that audiences demonstrated higher levels of issue knowledge and support for campaign finance reform, compared to audiences watching mainstream news.

Anderson and Kincaid (2013: 184) and Wiesman (2011: 32) have also highlighted the educational elements of *TDS*, arguing that it enlightens audiences to the framing activities performed by the mainstream media that are dominated by commercial interests. In return, it teaches them to be aware of the constructed nature of packaged information found in the news (Ibid). This is generally achieved by the shows juxtapositioning of videos which attempts to illustrate blatant lies and dishonestly in media reporting and how the media rely heavily on editing to craft and frame information (Baym 2005, 2009). This approach was apparent when Jon Stewart interviewed *Mad Money* host Jim Cramer. Here Stewart juxtaposed videos and tough questioning to demonstrate Cramer's preoccupation with 'entertaining audiences' rather than informing them about the impending financial crisis of 2008 (Day 2011: 79). What we can gather from these examples is that *TDS* utilises a counter-hegemonic approach to pick apart the dominant practices of the media and even the election system. The result is a reporting approach that shows audiences that hegemony is "subject to contestation and oppositional understanding" (Anderson & Kincaid 2013: 183). Consequently, this promotes the kind of questioning necessary for informed deliberation, dissent and formative democratic culture (Ibid).

There exists a wealth of other examples that demonstrate the challenges that *TDS* has exerted against the mainstream media's reporting style. Research also shows that the *TDS* can offer audiences more 'real' news than the mainstream media. For example, Fox et al (2007) found that it provided more substantial political information on the 2004 election, compared to the mainstream news. In addition, a more recent study found that satire can actually award detailed knowledge on subjects that the mainstream media tend to avoid. Feldman (2011: 27) argues that *TDS*'s attention to subjects such as science and the environment are impressive, particularly as the show dedicated a greater percentage of its news to science/technology in comparison to regular news. Such examples indicate why audiences, journalists and academics are praising *TDS* for its reporting approach. Mader (2009), for example, asserts that the shows interviewing and reporting techniques are an example of quality journalism that we should see in all news outlets, but rarely do.

Despite the wealth of positive findings, it is important to remember that *TDS* is primarily a comedy show. Therefore the idea that it can empower citizens with

political knowledge and produce information more superior than the mainstream news is refutable. Although its main focus is American politics, a study carried out by Pew (2008) found that a great deal of news is absent from *TDS*. This is particularly true of tragic events that have happened in recent years such as the Minneapolis bridge collapse and the shootings at Virginia Tech, which were covered extensively by the mainstream media, yet they received only a cursory mention on *TDS*. The reason for the shows lack of coverage is not entirely clear however, as these stories had a serious and devastating tone, *TDS* may have found it difficult to approach them when comedy is the dominant theme of the show.

The final central theme evident in *TDS*'s reporting, and also in its message at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', is a deliberative and civil approach to political communication. This is a trait that Baym (2010: 118) has also identified, as he argues that the show ultimately advocates a deliberative theory of democracy – the notion that only civil and honest conversation can provide a legitimate foundation for democratic governance. The defining features of the deliberative model are reasoned conversation and compromise in the hope that it will achieve bipartisan solutions. As discovered in much of the evidence throughout the last few chapters, these features are clearly lacking in the news because of the prevalence of partisan news and, according to Baym (2010: 119); the "frenzied and often unintelligible twenty-four hour news media". It is an approach that Jon Stewart has clearly supported throughout his career as *TDS* anchor. For example, in his renowned interview on *CNN's Crossfire,* he argued that the show's hosts were "hurting America" because of their partisan bickering. Moreover, in contrast to the mainstream news, *TDS* does not adopt an aggressive adversarial approach to secure audiences. Viewers are rarely exposed to instances of partisan screaming matches on this satirical platform, even when Stewart is confronted with interview guests that he disagrees with politically. Wilz (2011: 88, 89) makes a similar argument in her study of Republican guests featured on the show. Despite their obvious differences in opinion, the conversations do not evolve into personal attacks or other dehumanising processes – just calm civilised debate with both parties acknowledging their respect for one another (Ibid). While there is an obvious gap in the research that examines the deliberative successes of *TDS*, it is clear from the show's narrative that the show is chiefly concerned with the well-being of the public sphere and democracy. According to Baym (2010: 119), *TDS* feels that the

political and media system should be comprised of individuals engaged in reasoned discussion - a cooperative discourse that seeks to reach a consensual notion of the common good.

4.3 *TDS* Citizens – Political Participation and Apathy

One way to gauge the impact of political satire on audiences is to consider whether *TDS* is able to facilitate or encourage political participation. Goldwaite-Young and Esralew (2011: 112) discovered in their study of *TDS* audience that they are not disengaged from the political process. In fact, they are more politically engaged and participatory than people who do not watch these types of shows (Ibid). In particular *TDS* viewers are prone to 'thick' demonstrations of citizenship such as political deliberation as Goldwaite-Young and Esralew (2011: 113) found that when it comes to discussing politics with friends, family, co-workers and people online, this audience is ahead of the curve. While these findings suggest positive links between active citizenship and *TDS*, it must also be considered that those taking part in the study may have already been active citizens prior to engaging with the show. Therefore, there may not be any direct causality between *TDS* and political participation.

While there is little scholarly research on the effects of hybrid satire on audience engagement with politics, *TDS*'s publishing of its book *America: a citizen's guide to democracy* illustrates its attempts to encourage citizens to embrace the political landscape. While the book utilises humour and hyperbole to communicate the history and contemporary models of American democracy, it also encourages citizens to believe that democracy is the best available form of government (Michels & Ventimiglia 2007: 83). Furthermore, the book also encourages its audience to take a more active role in contemporary democracy. For example, in the books afterword Stewart (2004: 1, 220) writes:

> When democracy advances into old age…it becomes dysfunctional, as the best and the brightest of your nation shun public service, and by the end, you can't even recognise your own ideas. But such processes are reversible: there is, so to speak, a fountain of youth for democratic regimes that reverses the aging process, breathing new life into areas where genuine democracy is almost entirely absent. In this way, *America* [the book] can be read as a call to action, an antidote for democracy in action.

What this example illustrates is *TDS*'s attempts to operate as an instrument of the public sphere by calling on its audiences to play a more influential and effective role in modern democracy. This is not the only example of the shows call to action, as the core of this study - the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' - was another attempt by Jon Stewart to encourage the American people to participate in aid of another cause; to support a more civil tone in the nation's political rhetoric.

While the evidence thus far presents a positive representation of *TDS* as an instigator of democratic participation and deliberation, it is important to consider the different types of audiences that watch the show and their relationship with it. For instance, audiences may engage with it in completely different ways. Van Zoonen (2005: 50) for example, argues that the relationship between the audience and the show can be mutually beneficial for both parties, as they "come to being as a result of performance"; both "resemble one another when it comes to endeavours that make one part of a community. But this begs the question; how politically motivated are the more passionate members of *TDS* audience that consider themselves 'fans'? In a study of the show's audience, Jones (2010: 227) found that they were actively engaged with it through blogging, activity on internet fan pages, consuming their respective show's commodities, and using the internet to act out on-screen commands. These demonstrations of activity however do not account for social and political activities in audiences. When researching the blogging and social networking pages of *TDS*, Burwell and Boler (2008) spoke to one fan who said, "you'd be amazed at how un-political the fan community is". Another participant, and *TDS* enthusiast, Anita stated on her blogging site, "if you want politics, go away" (Ibid). Evidently, audiences do not necessarily watch the show because of its news reporting, but because of other motives, such as feelings towards the host or simply because they identify the comedic aspects of it. Some audiences then consider *TDS* to be far removed from the political process because they only identify with it as a comedy show. This is a finding that supports Dayan's (2001: 75) research on the fields of politics and popular culture, as he argues that the two produce very different types of audience practice (Cited in van Zoonen 2005: 56).

While some *TDS* audiences only identify and participate with the show as fans, other scholarly research challenges the premise that hybrid satire can encourage any form of political participation. The studies of Baumgartner and Morris (2006) and Feldman (2007), for instance, argue that *TDS* can have a detrimental impact on civic participation because it can encourage cynicism towards political institutions and consequently alienate people from the political process. Further research has attributed the cynicism and disengagement from civic participation to *TDS*'s satirical reporting approach. Hart and Hartelius (2007: 264) argue that rather than engaging viewers in a constructive way about contemporary political discourse, Stewart is too full of contempt and/or cynicism to propose alternative agents of change.

Hart and Hartelius bring to light a major limitation associated with the satire genre; that it cannot instigate or change the political process. Griffin (1994: 11) concurs, this is because satire is part of the comedy genre thus it has no direct role in influencing politics. Freud (1960: 11) agrees, adding that the satirist translates their anger and resentment into a satirical attack which excludes them and their audience of the need for direct action. This collection of research asserting the ineffectiveness of satire and its encouragement of political cynicism draws parallels with the work of Nina Eliasoph (1998) and what she has termed the 'cynical chic' disposition. Citizens who embrace this approach do so via a detached form of political participation. This means that citizens are willing to engage in political debate, but they use cynical digs and humour to convince themselves that they cannot do anything to change the political process (Elisasoph 1998: 154). The cynical citizen in this respect, mirrors Hart and Hartelius's interpretation of Jon Stewart's reporting approach on *TDS*. Both parties may criticise and laugh at the current state of politics, yet they are unwilling to partake in constructive approaches to change current political practices for the better.

According to Eliasoph (1998: 154), the cynical chic disposition "closes off avenues for involvement that go beyond expressions of vehement disengagement". This argument and those that question the democratising abilities of *TDS* (See Baumgartner & Morris 2006, Feldman 2007, and Bennett 2007) does not bode well for this study's examination of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and how it was perceived, and whether attendance at the event was a demonstration of active citizenship. More recent work on political satire however challenges the negative

interpretations of it discussed thus far. Amber Day (2011, 145, 146), in her book *Satire and Dissent,* argues that ironic and satiric activism in particular can actually encourage political engagement and political participation. This is because satire, in the form of activism, can attract attention to a specific cause, and actively calls upon the audiences' shared assumptions in an attempt to bring discursive communities together. This is achieved by turning laughter over a shared idea or joke into anger and thus political engagement and action (Ibid). As an event that draws similarities to demonstrations of activism like political rallies and protest, the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' could potentially be a platform that encourages political mobilisation in satire audiences. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the wealth of research that challenges this premise too.

Scholars who have studied the rally and its significance have restricted their analysis to the media coverage of the event and found that Stewart's move from comedy to the political arena was heavily criticised (Jones et al 2012 & Carlson & Peifer 2013). For example, Carlson and Peifer (2013: 14) found that journalists engaged in boundary work to situate Stewart's actions at the rally negatively. They did this by suggesting that Stewart's move from being an outsider to an insider in the political process would detract from his satiric effectiveness (Ibid). Jones et al (2012: 42) also found that the media were largely critical of the rally but because it did not fit in with their preconceptions of what constitutes political protest**.** Only Herbig & Hess (2012: 280) engaged with the rallygoers through video interviews on the day where they concluded that most of them "framed their attendance, or participation, as a way of showing their support for Stewart's argument against media industries". While these studies will be used to either support or refute some of the findings in this research project, it seems that none of them have examined acts of citizenship at the rally and its potential impact. At present, this chapter will support Cao's (2010: 43) argument that "it may be too early to draw a definitive conclusion on the potential effect that *TDS* has on the democratic system in the US". It is the intention of this study however to add further clarity to this field by examining the American media's perception of the rally and the public's response and relationship with it.

4.4 Conclusion

It was the intention of this chapter to examine *TDS* because the programme was responsible for organising the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' which is the core subject of this thesis. The chapter has shown us how the traits and reporting approach found in the *TDS* programme relate significantly to the issues raised in Jon Stewart's 'Rally to Restore Sanity' invitation. Audiences have become disillusioned and tired of mainstream news due to a range of contributing factors, such as the commercialisation of news and the increasingly aggressive and sensationalist tone found in news reporting.

TDS's use of satire and political critique however has captured the audiences' and news media's attention because of what they deem is its successful attempt to redefine the conventions of journalism. According to scholars such as Baym (2010), Jones (2010), Baumgartner (2008), Feldman (2011) and Wilz (2011), *TDS* contributes significantly to the premise of the public sphere and democracy in a number of ways. It has been argued that the programme is a more accessible platform for citizen engagement with news; it acts on behalf of citizens by publicising their concerns and it provides more context and detailed coverage of news events. Additionally, similarly to the message it advocates at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', *TDS* also promotes civil deliberation in political communication, a trait it seems that is largely absent from mainstream news reporting.

While this chapter has highlighted a wealth of research demonstrating the positive aspects of *TDS*'s reporting style, there is concern about its ability to influence civic participation. Indeed, research (Young & Esralew 2011: 112, Michels & Ventimiglia 2007: 83) has shown that *TDS* audiences are politically active and that the programme does attempt to encourage participation in democracy. Yet studies on the civic behaviours of *TDS* audience and the influence the show may have on political participation is relatively sparse. It is important to consider then that the show may have no positive influence on active citizenship and the democratic process. This argument is even more poignant when examining fan research which suggests that parts of the fan community pay no regard to the political aspects of *TDS*. Furthermore it is necessary to contemplate the negative impacts of satire on citizenship such as increased cynicism and apathy aimed at the media and political system.

In sum, the field of *TDS* research is yet to provide a more informed conclusion on the shows political influence. This project however, intends to fill this research gap by analysing audience's interpretations and relationship with the show to see whether it has any bearing on the way they think about and engage with politics. The way in which these questions will be approached is by examining *TDS*'s 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and the media and public's response to it. The next chapter will present the methodological approach that will be used to study this event, as well as the research questions that will be used.

Chapter 5 - Research Aims & Methodology

It is the intention of this chapter to outline the research aims and the methodological approach used to study the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and the people that attended. The chapter will start with the 6 main research questions, and an account of their relevance to this study and the field of satire research. This will be followed by an exploration of the different and appropriate methodological approaches that were used to answer these questions effectively. Particular attention is paid to elements of social movement theory given that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' could be viewed as a political event, or a "reconceptualisation of what constitutes protest" (Jones et al 2012).

5.1 Research Questions

1)   In what ways did the news media frame the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'?

2)   In what ways did the news media frame the rallygoers?

3)   What motivated the rallygoers to attend the event?

4)   In what ways do the rallygoers participate in politics more broadly?

5)   In what ways did the rallygoers participate at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'?

6)   How did the news media and rallygoers perceive the effectiveness of the rally and its long-term impact?

RQ1 was concerned with how the rally was framed by the news media. This question is an important one to ask because the rally operated outside of the standard *TDS* programme format in that it took place on the Washington Mall. This is significant, because the Mall is known as the "heart of American democracy" and a site where serious political issues are advocated or challenged (Turner 2008: 73, 77). In contrast, *TDS* is still primarily a comedy show, thus it was imperative to examine how the media framed the show's move from the safe realms of comedy played out in the TV studio, to the field of politics.

In addition, it was also necessarily to examine the media framing of the rally because of the ambiguity that surrounded it. Prior to the event taking place, there was much speculation regarding its intentions. Media and audience speculation ranged from it being a comedic/music event, a protest event supporting civility in politics, and a

platform that would encourage citizens to vote in the mid-term election. Jon Stewart's characterisations of the rally were equally ambiguous. His initial invitation suggested that this was a non-partisan event for people who were tired of the extremism and vitriol found in American political discourse. Yet his call on the American people to mobilise on the Washington Mall, to send a message to the country's leaders and national media, implied that this could actually be a politically motivated event. To add further confusion to the meaning of the rally, Stewart (2010) downplayed the significance of the event, arguing that it was in no way political. The result was an event that was open to interpretation by those who chose to watch or participate in it. Thus the media framing question would provide critical insight into how the event was interpreted by the various media platforms that reported it.

RQ2 and 3 were focused on the people that attended the rally, for example how they were framed by the news media and also what motivated them to attend the event. Both questions were significant to news audiences' perceptions of the rallygoers because they may have been framed and reported in a multitude of ways, from protestors, to fans of *TDS,* or a combination of both. The same argument was also applicable to the participants' reasons for attending, as it could be a demonstration of protest, fandom, fun or these reasons combined. As discovered in the literature review, many members of the *TDS* audience only watch the show for comedic purposes (Burwell and Boler 2008). Yet Stewart's call on the American people to attend the rally and support its civility message meant there was a possibility that the participants' attendance could be perceived by the media as protest mobilisation. In instances of activism, Gitlin (1980: 27) describes how the news media can frame participants through deprecatory themes that may undermine the message they are advocating. That is why questions relating to the rally participants were central to this study because it would aid its understanding of who these people were and why they decided to attend this ambiguous event.

RQ4 was used to add additional clarity to scholarly perceptions of *TDS* audience and whether they are politically active citizens. In addition, asking this question allowed me, the researcher, to identify whether the rally was a participatory gateway for people that were not normally politically active. Furthermore, if the rallygoers identified themselves as politically active this might have influenced the way they

perceived the rally. For example, if they were regularly involved in 'thick' acts of citizenship they may have viewed the rally as a fun rather than political event because of its inclusion of satire and popular culture. RQ4 would also influence how the rallygoers responded to the next research question which was concerned with how they participated at the event.

RQ5 then was concerned with the ways in which the rallygoers participated at the event. This question would establish whether those in attendance viewed the rally as a political activist event and did their behaviour reflect 'thin' or 'thick' acts of civic participation. Alternatively, their participation may have been limited to the role they adopt as *Daily Show* viewers; simply attending to support Jon Stewart's political civility message.

RQ6 was concerned with how the media and those who attended the rally perceived the event and whether it had any lasting impact. Because this was an event that fell outside of the standard *TDS* TV format, this study wanted to explore whether it could achieve the same success as the show. Also, given that a variety of scholars (Griffin 1994, Freud 1960, Kernan 1965) argue that satire is an ineffective platform for political solutions or direct action, it was important for this study to analyse the legacy and impact that the event would have on US political and popular culture. To examine these questions and ideas surrounding *TDS* and its audience, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods were used which will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

5.2 Interviews
The first method to be discussed is the study's use of semi-structured interviews. Despite the wealth of studies (Goldwaite-Young & Tisinger 2006, Feldman & Goldwaite-Young 2008, Goldwaite-Young & Esralew 2011, Brewer & Cao 2011, Baumgartner & Morris 2006), on *TDS* and its audience, the vast majority use a quantitative analysis approach such as content analysis and surveys. *TDS* scholars also rely on discourse analysis to study its potential effects (See Jones et al 2012, Jones 2005, 2010, Baym 2010, Baum 2003/2005). This research tends to make assumptions about *TDS* audience and how their engagement with the show can affect what news they watch and their political participatory habits. However, these arguments are

made without speaking to the audience directly. In this study, it was crucial to incorporate audience interviews to help fill this research gap left by other *TDS* scholars. Consequently, this approach would be able to shed light on audiences who attended the rally and how they personally made sense of the contemporary political and media environment.

For this study, a semi-structured interview approach was used and conducted via Skype. The semi-structured approach was the most beneficial because it allowed me, the interviewer, to retain control of the terms of the discussion (Deacon et al, 2007: 67). According to King and Horrocks (2010: 314), this is because semi-structured interviews utilise a list of questions on fairly specific topics to be covered throughout the interview and the questions that are asked are repeated in each interview thereafter. The semi-structured approach however is not burdened by the restrictions of a structured interview. This is because questions that are not included in the interview guide may also be asked if, for instance, the interviewer picks up on things said by the interviewee's (Ibid).

To prevent leading questions, multiple drafts of the interview questionnaire were created until a final interview guideline was produced[6]. It was also necessary to cater for certain eventualities, for example; if I needed to clarify an answer or push the respondent for further information, I would respond in a neutral manner using probing questions such as, "Could you explain in more detail what you mean by that?" (Deacon 2007: 67). Also, other neutral prompt words were included in the interview guide if, for instance, the interviewee was unsure how to respond to a question[7]. This approach was essential as it prevented me, the researcher, who was new to the interview process, from losing control of the interview and leading the interviewee towards biased topics.

To address the central aims of this study and ensure the interviewees felt comfortable and able to respond thoroughly, the structure and order of the questions were broken down into a series of subsections. First it was important to structure the interview to

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[6] Please find interview guideline attached Appendix A
[7] For example, one of the questions relating to the rally requires the interviewee to give their impression of the crowd. This is a rather broad question so prompter words are used such as gender, ethnicity, age etc if the interviewee is unsure how to address the question

help build a rapport with the respondents and to make them feel comfortable as this would ensure that the questions that were posed would be answered fully. To start the interview, the respondents were reminded of the information found in the consent form[8] that they signed prior to the interview taking place. Here they were informed that the information they would provide was confidential as their names would be changed for the purpose of this study. The intentions of the research were also explained and how they were making an important contribution to this study. This was followed by a series of icebreaker questions about the interviewees themselves. Here they were asked where they were from and if they wanted to add anything else about themselves. The latter question was not as intrusive as asking outright questions about the personal lives of the interviewees. It did however, give them the opportunity to add something about themselves; whether it was about their career or hobbies, but only if they felt comfortable doing so. There was also a series of questions relating to *TDS* such as, why and how often they watched it. While they could also be perceived as icebreaker questions to ease the respondent into the interview process, the responses to these questions proved insightful. For example, depending on their relationship with the show, i.e. as primarily comedy or as a valid news source, it also impacted on whether they viewed the rally as a political or entertainment event, or a combination of both.

Once the introductory questions had been answered the questions that followed addressed the major research aims of this study relating to the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and the interviewees engagement with the event's message. First, the interviewees were asked why they decided to attend the event, what did they do while they were at the rally, and how they summarised the effectiveness of the event. These questions related to whether participants perceived the rally as a political event and whether their attendance was motivated by this. Depending on their responses, the latter questions would establish the extent of the participants involvement at the rally and if they advocated a specific remedy to deal with current communication practices[9]. Moreover, their responses would also show whether the rally was successful in promoting a more civilised approach to political communication practices.

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[8] Consent form can be found under Appendix D.
[9] This question will also be supported by quantitative media framing where Entman's collective action framing theory will be applied. Please see content analysis section for a more extensive analysis.

The questions that followed focused on ideas surrounding active citizenship, thus it was imperative to not ask the interviewees outright whether they were politically active because they may have felt pressured into answering that they were. I wanted to ease the participants into this section of questions by initially gauging their thoughts on the thinnest type of political participation – voting. This question, on many occasion, opened up a discourse on the effectiveness and importance of voting. In turn, this made it easier to ask whether the interviewee's could think of and discuss any instances where they had been politically active. These questions would inform *TDS* scholarship in two ways: by supporting or refuting Goldwaite and Young's (2011) argument that *TDS* audiences are more politically engaged and participatory than people who do not watch these types of shows. Moreover, it could also determine whether regular practitioners of civic participation were more dismissive of the rally as an event that could instigate political change.

The choice and selection process of the 30 people that were interviewed were gathered via a non-random sampling process technique. This is a form of convenience sampling and it was used because the interview subjects were selected on account of their convenient accessibility. For example, many agreed to take part in the study after a message was posted on the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' Facebook page asking for interview subjects. Some agreed to take part after I had met and spoken to them at the rally. Others were gathered through 'snowball sampling' (Deacon et al 2007: 54), whereby interviewees recommended further contacts that would be suitable to take part in the study.

One of the problems associated with research interviews is that it can be extremely difficult to put preventative measures in place for instances where the interviewees may have lied or embellished the truth. One explanation for such behaviour is 'social desirability bias', whereby interviewees have a tendency to respond to questions in order to meet the approval of the person conducting the interview (Crowne & Marlowe 1964). This was a scenario I envisaged happening when asking respondents about their level of active citizenship, because they may not have wanted to appear apathetic.

Of course, while interviews can offer valuable insider information, it is important to remember the limitations of using this methodological approach. For this study, the research gathered from the interview process only represents a minority of opinions. Therefore, the results will not represent the views of *TDS* audiences and rally attendees as a whole. To complement the semi-structured interviews, ethnographic field notes were also taken by me, the researcher, at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'.

5.3 Ethnography
Although the interview process could provide an insight into the political behaviours of *TDS* audience and their engagement with the rally, it was not something that could be actively monitored or proved via that research method alone. Ethnography, on the other hand, enables researchers to observe and listen to people as they go about their everyday lives, so that the researcher can understand the way that they behave or think on their own terms (Machin 2002: 1).

This study used ethnography but not the full scale approach that Machin describes. For example, it did not continually monitor the everyday behaviours of people and nor did it attempt to understand the way that people think about their actions or behaviour. Ethnography was used in this study on a much smaller scale because it involved observing the cultural environment of the participants at the rally. This included monitoring their behaviour and their use of signs and fancy dress costume. While, this was not an extensive ethnographic approach, it still allowed me, the researcher, to gather more in-depth or conflicting information on the rallygoers in comparison to that found during the interview process, particularly the questions that related directly to the rally. For example, the interviews may have encouraged a particular response from the respondents, while the opinions and behaviour of *TDS* audiences at the rally may have been very different. Thus, although interviews can offer new perspectives that challenge assumptions made about *TDS* audiences, observing audience behaviour in the culture of the rally might offer an entirely different perspective.

As the field researcher, I adopted a 'fly on the wall' approach, which meant that no formal relationship was built with the people being observed and they were not made aware of the researcher's activities (Deacon et al 2007: 250). This was important because, if the rallygoers were made aware of my role as a researcher, this may have influenced their behaviour.

The analysis process involved taking photographs and field notes at the rally which fell in line with a number of pre-determined topics. Thus, during the event, a number of areas were taken into consideration. For example, Machin (2002: 12) states that groups tend to have a shared cultural understanding of the world and that the way they act and talk is influenced directly by the culture they belong to. Consequently, ethnographic observation allowed me to gather further information about who the rally participants were and their reasons for attending. In most cases, this was made obvious through their interactions with one another, and the signs they brought to the event. Signs and the rallygoers choice of attire were particularly important, because they showed that participation at the rally was not limited to mere attendance, but a way in which the attendees could voice their opinions (Herbig & Hess 2012: 280). Thus utilising a covert approach was necessary because it would account for something that the interview process could not; biases in interview respondents and an independent examination of the behaviours and conduct of those attending the rally.

With any covert ethnography, especially those that involve photographing the general public, consideration is given to the potential ethical issues involved. Sarah Pink, in her book *Doing Visual Ethnography* (2007: 53), emphasises the idea of a collaborative relationship between the researcher and informant when taking photographs so that they work together to create the visual image. Without requiring permission, it is assumed that the covert researcher is videoing or photographing the behaviour of the informants in a secretive way (Ibid). This was not the case with the field research photographs taken at the rally. Signs and attire were a huge part of the event and many people took pictures of other rallygoers signs and costumes. Social media was also a central part of the rally as participants were encouraged by Jon Stewart (2010), in the run up to the event, to upload images to Flickr, Twitter and the 'Rally to Restore Sanity's' main website of peoples' signs and costumes. From the offset then, rallygoers, were made aware that this was not a private event and that there was a possibility that their images would be uploaded to the Internet. Consequently, most people were quite happy to have their photo's taken, although I did seek permission from people where their faces were clearly visible in the image I would be using. These individuals granted their permission and welcomed the opportunity to discuss their signs or what they were wearing. Of course, while I may

not have made these people aware of my role as a researcher, permission was still asked and granted which, to a certain extent, means there was an element of collaboration between myself and the informants. Furthermore, unlike most people taking pictures at the rally, my field research images would not be uploaded to social media websites like Twitter who have the right to use, modify and transmit peoples photo's in anyway they see fit (Smith 2013).

Thus far, the methods applied to the research framework have been used to form a better understanding of how participants engaged with the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. Here, the motives behind their attendance were analysed as well as the type of people that attended and their engagement and behaviour at the event. The method that follows maintains a similar aim, yet from the perspective of the news media and how they interpreted the rally and people that attended.

5.4 Content & Framing Analysis

The reasons for analysing the media's reporting of the rally is that, in most cases, they get to define how an event is packaged and relayed to audiences. That is why the study of mass communication is so important because, according to McQuail (1994: 55), the media have significant effects on the way news stories are perceived. Before this section examines how these methods relate to the research questions, the rationale behind the use of content analysis and media framing will each be explained in turn.

First, content analysis is a quantitative approach that examines texts and enables the researcher to quantify salient and manifest features of a large number of texts (Deacon et al 2007: 119). Thereafter, statistics are used to make broader inferences about the processes and politics of representation (Deacon et al 2007, Hansen et al 1998: 95). During the study, texts are subjected to the same investigative procedures to ensure analytical consistency and reduce researcher influence over the results (Deacon et al 2007: 133). The background research and research questions help identify what to code prior to the analysis taking place. During the analysis, specific instances and occurrences of certain words or story themes are then recorded (Berger 1998: 23). It is important that each theme is clearly defined to ensure that it cannot be applied or coded to another category. For this study a coding sheet[10] was applied to a pilot

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[10] Please find the coding sheet attached (Appendix B)

analysis of 15 articles to establish reliability, and also to improve the variable questions by adjusting any apparent errors.   Applying this method helped uncover the major themes evident in the media's reporting of the rally and the people that attended.

The media texts were taken from a comprehensive sample of global news stories which included newspapers, news magazines, Internet news, blogs and cable news shows that represented a broad spectrum of political affiliations. These were obtained from the online database LexisNexis. The sample date period was not comprehensive, as the analysis was concerned with articles that commented prior to and after the rally. Consequently, the sample was taken from the 28th of October, two days before the rally took place on the 31st October 2010, and two days after that. The text sample was gathered by means of a specific search term which was: the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. A second sample was also obtained to address the aims of RQ6 regarding how the rally was perceived by sources in the aftermath of the event and what was its legacy and potential impact. This sample was taken from the 3rd of November 2010 (3 days after the rally) up to April 2014, to ensure a large sample of articles. Unlike the first sample period that accumulated a total of 210 articles, the second analysis was inevitably low, with only 47 articles in total.

The content analysis then was used to statistically quantify a series of questions aimed at the sample of news media texts. This included questions that related to the type of sources that were featured, the type of publication, and other simple yes no questions, all of which can be found in the coding sheet (See Appendix B). The analysis also addressed RQ1 and RQ2 which were concerned with how the media attempted to report the rally and the people that attended. The issue with using content analysis alone is that it can only present an 'overall' picture of how the news media reported the rally. For example, Deacon (2007: 119) argues that "by looking at aggregated meaning-making *across* texts, the method tends to skate over complex and varied processes of meaning making *within* the texts". As a result, content analysis is not always well suited to studying 'deep' questions about textual and discursive forms (Ibid). This argument was applicable to this study because content analysis could only account for major themes in the way the rally was reported i.e. that it was either politically motivated, a hybrid political/popular culture event or a popular culture

event. In order to unpack these themes in more detail it was necessarily to supplement the content analysis study by incorporating framing analysis. According to Neunendorf (2002), "framing analysis is located somewhere between content and discourse analysis". Therefore this method allowed me, the researcher, to unpack the themes gathered during the content analysis in more detail.

Framing analysis is specifically used to "examine news discourse with the primary focus of conceptualising news texts into empirically operationalisable dimensions so that evidence of the news media's framing of issues can be gathered" (Pan & Kosicki 1993: 55). 'Frames' in this instance, are the "central organising idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding event and what it is about" (Gamson & Modigliani 1987: 143). Put simply, framing analysis provides analytical depth to the themes gathered during the content analysis with reference also made to the potential impact and outcome effects of such framing. According to Entman (1993: 52), this is because framing in news involves the selection and salience of "some aspects of a perceived reality to make them more visible in communication texts". Frames then can define peoples interpretations of events based on what they omit, as well as what they include. Therefore, the exclusion of potential problem definitions, explanations, evaluations, and recommendations may be as critical as the inclusion in guiding the audience (Ibid). Consequently, framing was the most applicable method that could be used to answer the research questions that were concerned with the way the rally and the attendees were reported. Furthermore, it would also help determine how the rally was perceived in terms of its effectiveness and long-term impact.

A comprehensive research approach was used to identify the media frames for RQ1. It started with the use of content analysis that formed a series of broad categories to capture the ways in which the rally was reported. As discussed earlier, these categories fell into 3 areas which included: politically motivated, hybrid and popular culture[11]. However, many of the news texts featured a number of thematic elements and framing interpretations of the event which could not be fully captured by the 3 broad category descriptions alone. This meant that when carrying out the analysis, I, the researcher, would firstly assign the broad category that the text belonged to i.e.

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[11] Please see Coding Manual (Appendix C) for comprehensive break down of the major categories and their definitions.

politically motivated, and then I would determine in what way it could be perceived as such. For example, was it politically motivated because the rally was framed as an activist event? Or, because it was reported as an event that would encourage voting? Unlike content analysis, that would just count this information, by incorporating framing analysis, this study also gathered key quotes from the news texts that encapsulated the specific framing style. These quotes would then be featured and analysed in the results chapters to determine their broader meaning and impact.

The same process of analysis was used for RQ's 2 and 5 but obviously the main category subject for each question differed to that of RQ1. The categories for RQ2 regarding the way the rallygoers were described was a lot more specific given the limited ways they could be characterised. This was necessary as, regardless of the depth offered within the news programme or article, the description of the individual(s) could be undermined by factors including dress or behaviour (Gitlin 1980: 27).

RQ5 required a much broader collection of categories to capture the variety of themes that were present in peoples' responses to the rally's effectiveness. The categories for this question can be found in Question10c[12] in the Coding Manual which are clearly defined as optimistic, pessimistic and mixed reactions. These 3 categories include individual definitions so responses could be measured accurately. Again, once the broad category was recognised (e.g. pessimistic responses) and counted, the specific frame (e.g. that satire was an ineffective platform for political action), and quotes to support this were gathered and noted down in the comments and quotes section found under Q10c on the Coding Sheet[13]. The second part of RQ5 was concerned with the potential impact that the rally had in the months and years that followed. As a result, it was necessary to define how impact could be measured so that they could be easily categorised. Impact in this case, was measured in relation to responses detailing the legacy of the rally which are clearly defined in Q10d found in the Coding Manual. This included categories relating to instances where the rally was linked to further political action, criticism and success for *TDS* brand.

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[12] Coding Manual found under Appendix C
[13] Coding sheet found under Appendix B

A combination of both content and framing analysis were also used on RQ's 2 and 5 which examined the motivations behind the rallygoers attendance and the ways in which they participated at the event. Undertaking these questions meant applying what Snow and Benford (1992: 137) refer to as a 'collective action frame'. This approach is generally applied to the analysis of social movement groups to understand the collective experiences of those involved and to unify the meaning of the campaign they support (Ibid). When conducting the pilot analysis, there were a number of similarities that could be drawn from the attendees' experience and the collective action frame work. This is because some of those interviewed by the media were keen to explain their reasons for attending, which, in some instances, resembled the aims of protesters and social movements.

The collective action frame was broken down into a series of levels to categorise the reasoning and issues that the attendees gave for their support of the rally which may have also impacted how they participated at the event. For example, those who attended the rally for activist reasons may have participated at the event by encouraging others to take part in future acts of political action that supported the idea of civility in politics or other social issues. In contrast, the participatory behaviour of those who attended for fun might have been limited to just watching the event from the Mall. Because of the ambiguity surrounding peoples motivations for attending the rally and their possible behaviour at the event, not every participant featured in the media texts would specify a collective action response. Thus to accommodate for this, the framing analysis firstly allocated the exact reason for attendance into an initial category[14]. Once this had been established, and depending on the reason given by the rallygoer, a second separate question was applied to the study that utilised Entman's diagnostic framework. Entman (1993: 52) states that the media typically frame news items in the following way:

Level 1: **The overarching problem**
Level 2: **Diagnose causes**
Level 3: **Defining the specific problem**
Level 4: **Suggested remedies**

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[14] See Q4a on the coding manual (Appendix C)

What the diagnostic framework illustrates is that each level offers further context to the media text. In this instance, it was used to demonstrate whether the media gave the participants time to specify why the rally was taking place, who or what groups were the target of the rally, and why they were to blame. This was followed by a discussion on the possible consequences for those held accountable, and finally, did the rallygoers specify solutions on how civility could be achieved. By specifying solutions, the rallygoer would be adopting a 'thicker' demonstration of citizenship than those who simply attended to watch the event.

News sources were also examined to provide context to a range of other issues raised in the news media texts. Monitoring source activity and opinions was necessary as, according to Bennett (1990: 106, 122), the range of social voices in news is likely to vary widely from one issue area to another. For example, Kitzinger (1999: 59) states that framing is context sensitive and that the different sentiments that are portrayed and how each speaker is introduced have a very important influence on the outcome of a story. Hall et al's (1978) primary definer theory supports this argument as they attribute the media's reliance on powerful institutions as a means to them establishing control and definition over news stories. To account for the different opinions of the sources and their prevalence in the media texts, each individual was coded separately. They were then used to decipher individual source opinions on the purpose of the rally and their concluding thoughts on the event.

All three of the prescribed methods used in this study are not without flaws, although Taylor (2001: 317, 318) argues that no research method is perfect. They can however be more academically sound in their combined strength. This is known as 'triangulation', where more than one method is used to investigate a specific problem or phenomenon (Taylor 2001: 322). It is believed that this approach will have a positive effect on the research findings because it enables researchers to check a full range of available sources to build up the most accurate and comprehensive account possible (Deacon 2007: 33). In this instance, a combined methodological framework has been selected to provide a comprehensive view of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', and the conduct of the participants at the event and as active citizens. By applying the methods in a specific order, each has the capacity to address the questions raised by the method and data before it.

The research approach set out in this methodology chapter demonstrates how this study of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity will take a slightly different approach to other *TDS* studies. This is because it has used a combined methodological approach that supplements and enriches the information gathered from news media texts, ethnographic field research and the rally participant interviewees. The next chapter will focus specifically on the media's framing of the rally and whether their reports reflected Jon Stewart's apolitical description of the event.

Chapter 6: Examining the Media's Framing of the Rally

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to analyse how the mainstream media and other news outlets reported Jon Stewart's 'Rally to Restore Sanity': an event that emerged as a response to hyper-partisan politics and news reporting in the United States. The rally was a rather unique event for fans and the media alike because of the ambiguity that surrounded it. It was unlike other political or social issue protests as Stewart made light of its activist potential and repeatedly denied that the event was in anyway political. This, coupled with the fact that *TDS* continues to grow in popularity as a trusted news format, indicates why it was important to study the media's representation of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. To study the rally, the theoretical framework of media framing was used to identify the different frames that were used to report it. This included examining global news texts such as newspapers, broadcast news, magazines, internet news, blogs and agency copy.

Other areas of analysis were also examined throughout the chapter. This included before and after interpretations of the rally and the frequency in which it was reported by different media platforms. Attention was also paid to the comparisons made between the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and the Glenn Beck 'Restoring Honour Rally', that also took place in Washington the same year.

Part 2 of the chapter examines the lack of detailed reporting on the rally and how this relates to wider academic debates on the conventions and norms of journalistic practice. This includes discussions relating to objectivity, the economic imperatives of news, and how the rally may not have fitted into frames of protest reporting indentified in other social movement studies. By utilising theories on media framing and journalist practice to examine the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', this will clarify whether the media interpreted it as a 'political event' as suggested at the beginning of this chapter. It will also illustrate whether the ambiguous nature of the rally led to a lack of detailed news reporting, and the media's vague and sometimes manipulated interpretation of the event.

6.1 The Rally's Political & Media Back Drop

In recent years partisan discourse has become an increasingly loud and unavoidable fixture of American political communication. While it has always been present, the pace increased in the period leading up to the 2008 presidential election. Democrats, their supporters and the left-wing media ridiculed VP nominee Sarah Palin because of her lack of foreign policy knowledge. Meanwhile, presidential nominee, John McCain, was targeted because of his comments about troop withdrawal from Iraq, which he argued may not happen for another 100 years (West 2008). The opposition were busy creating their own Obama myth, characterising him as a non-American black radical with ties to terrorism (Jasper 2008), who wanted to turn America into a socialist state (Schlesinger 2010). When the campaign period was over, attacks and counter responses from the political parties, their supporters and media advocates became ever more prevalent. News agenda items such as the 'Ground Zero Mosque' and the controversial Arizona Immigration Law, only served to raise tensions on racial politics between the left and right. Obama's stimulus package was also a subject of contention between opposing media outlets and was also thought to have led to the rise of the Tea Party movement, which according to Noonan, (2010) was "subtly dismissed by the liberal media and supported by conservative news platforms". Political polarisation continued to dominate news reporting during the 2010 mid-term election, conservative leaning media outlets like *Fox News* gave GOP candidates and Tea Party members an open platform to promote their campaigns and attack the opposition. Left-leaning media and advocacy groups went on the defensive too, attacking the Tea Party and its financially backed candidates such as Christine O'Donnell. Attacks and advocacy for the opposing parties was not the only method used by the partisan media, as financial contributions were made to the parties they were backing[15].

The literature review discussed how partisan news presents favourable coverage towards certain viewpoints, while criticising or shutting down those that they disagree with. Also, unlike the practices of 'professional journalism', where a premium is placed on objective and unbiased reporting (McChesney 2005 & 2003: 203), partisan news uses "gimmickry, comment and opinion rather than straight news reporting"

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[15] Fox News's parent company News Corp gave over 1 million dollars to The Republican Governors Association, and although he was later suspended for his actions, *MSNBC* pundit, Keith Olbermann donated thousands of dollars to Democrat candidates (Gertz 2010)

(Cushion & Lewis 2009: 132, 2012: 88).   The literature also showed how the partisan model has become increasingly popular with the American public[16], and how other media organisations have embraced the partisan model to secure more viewers (Sobieraj & Berry 2011: 24, Jones 2005: 38, Cushion 2012: 89).

Picking up on some of these arguments raised in the literature review chapter, the rise of partisan news does not necessarily signal the demise of journalism and the democratic process. Pasley (2001: 37) argues that a partisan press system has much to offer a democratic society, as long as there are numerous well-subsidized media providing a broad range of opinions. Despite the variety of news platforms that are available today, a Pew study (2012) found that citizens who consider themselves as either Republican or Democrat, have become more ideologically homogenous; watching and reading news that reflects their own ideologies.

The above finding highlights the problems associated with partisan news in the contemporary media environment where hyperbole and name-calling have become common practice. By continuing to use and adopt the partisan/opinionated model the media are consequently neglecting their fourth estate role which could be destructive to the democratic process. This is because it can misinform audiences and encourage distrust in political candidates and news media outlets (Jamieson and Capella 2008: 241). Polarised news also has serious repercussions for citizen deliberation, as they may no longer be open to oppositional points of view (Jamieson and Capella 2008: 244). It is this scenario described by Jamieson and Capella, and the manifestation of hyper-polarised news discourse which led Jon Stewart to organise the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. An event whose aim it was to encourage the partisan media and the American public to "take it down a notch" for the sake of rational political discourse (Stewart 2010a).

Like Jamieson and Capella (2008), Jon Stewart implied, in his rally invitation, that the extreme polarised discourse used by the media and political world was destructive to the democratic process. This is because it was not representative of ordinary American people or what they wanted from the news. According to Stewart, the

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[16] National cable networks like *Fox News* command the most attention from viewers (Pew Research Centre 2013b).

media were amplifying dogmatic and visceral opinion's which drowned out deliberative political dialogue that could help solve some of the issues that Americans were facing. Stewart (2010a) makes reference to this in a segment of his rally announcement:

> We live in troubled times…70-80% of the population have
> problems that have real but imperfect solutions that people
> could agree to try and could ultimately live with.
> Unfortunately the process and conversation is controlled by the
> other 15-20%. You may know them as people who believe that
> Obama is a secret Muslim, planning a socialist take-over of
> America…or that Bush let 9/11 happen. It's easy to get caught
> up in the rhetoric, but why don't we hear from the 70-80
> percenter's? Most likely because they have shit to do. Even if
> you had the time you may not have the theatrical flare
> necessary for today's 24 hour, 7 day a week news media.

Stewart suggests that the political and social issues experienced by average Americans are not discussed in the news because it favours those that shout the loudest. They choose to provide air time and column inches to dramatic story lines and controversial rhetoric because it carries more news value. The rally intended to address this problem by encouraging 70-80% of the population to gather on Washington's National Mall to call for rationality in political and media communication (Stewart 2010a).

The rally is a complex event to characterise. On the surface, Stewart's invitation suggests that it is a political demonstration because he encourages the audience to gather together on mass to support his call for rational political discourse. The cause itself appears politically motivated in relation to the Collins' (2013b) definition of the 'political' which refers to: "affairs relating to state, government and government policy" but also; "public issues that are of general interest to the population". In the case of the rally, the problem of polarised and extremist political rhetoric became the 'public issue' because Stewart alluded that its practice was preventing 'real issues' from being discussed in the public sphere.   As mentioned throughout this chapter, however, Stewart was keen to downplay the political potential of the event. When asked in an interview with Larry King (Stewart 2010b) whether the event was a political rally Stewart responded:

> No it's not in fact a political rally. We are presuming that the
> 70-80% of the country are reasonable people and they get
> along. They may not agree on things but they still get things

done. Then the other 15-20% control it, they control the
dialogue and the legislation. This is for the people that are too
busy, that have jobs, that have lives but are tired of their
reflection in the media being as a divided country that's
ideological and conflicted and fighting. This is for those
people.

In contrast to his original invitation, Stewart's response to Larry King suggested that
the rally was simply a 'non-partisan' event. Stewart then was hoping to show that a
segment of the American people were not prejudiced towards political outlooks they
did not agree with. These people wanted to support a cerebral approach to political
discussion to help resolve social issues instead of one that favoured emotion and
vitriol which, according to Stewart (2010), prevented these issues from being
discussed properly. While Stewart did not specify that it was a non-partisan event, his
interview with Larry King suggested that this was the most appropriate way to
categorise it. However, it would be premature at this stage of the analysis to label it
as such. After all, the rally's message and intentions are defined as 'political', as are
Stewart's attempts to mobilise the masses. For example, in his rally invitation
Stewart requested citizen involvement so that a message could be sent to the country's
leaders and national media about changing their approach to political communication.
Furthermore, the message embodies the essential characteristics of what could be
deemed 'political' because it relates to "partisan aspects of politics or issues of
general interest to the public" (Collins 2013) which, in this instance, is the practice of
a more deliberative model of democracy.

Whether the event was described as 'political' or 'non-partisan', Stewart did his best
to downplay its significance by using comedy and satire to ensure that it was open to
interpretation and could not be pinned down by one particular description. When
asked by Larry King (Stewart 2010b) whether Stewart was putting himself in the
same class as Martin Luther King, by holding the rally on the Washington Mall,
Stewart replied that he was putting himself in the same class as Martin Mull - Mull
being an American actor and comedian with no links to politics. Also, to rebut
questions about holding the event so close to the election, Stewart (2010b) again made
light of the political link by stating that the show was already in Washington because
of the mid-term election, and they would have done the rally earlier on the Friday but
he would have been "too tired" so he wanted the day off instead. He also added that

the rally was a chance for "some nice people to get together for fun, some special guests and some great conversation" (Ibid). These examples show that Stewart appeared to trivialise any suggestions that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was a political event. In addition, the latter quote about what would happen at the rally is not in anyway political. It suggests that it was a light-hearted event because of Stewart's comments about having fun and the presence of what could be celebrity guests.

By downplaying the rally's political potential, Stewart uses the same approach he adopts when discussing the journalistic potential of *TDS*. When Bill Moyers (2011) explained to Jon Stewart that he has a journalistic role, and that a lot of young people go to *TDS* to learn about current affairs, Stewart disagreed adding that, "there is no way that people are getting news from the show". He went on to say that, "People at *The Daily Show* are simply making jokes about what they see happening in the world and that's it". Stewart made a similar argument in his renowned *Crossfire* (2006) interview when he was criticised by Tucker Carlson for not asking hard hitting enough political questions. Stewart responded angrily adding: "you [Tucker] are on *CNN*, the show that leads into mine [*TDS*] is puppets making crank phone calls". By trivialising the journalistic potential of the show and emphasising its comedic elements Stewart is refuting suggestions that *TDS* has any social or journalistic responsibility. That is one of the benefits of utilising comedy or entertainment in social commentary, as former head of *CBS News*, Richard Salent (cited in Baym 2010: 28) argues that it can be used in television as a manipulative tool. This is because it grants dramatic license in "fiction which represents truth rationales" (Ibid). The inclusion of comedy then, awards someone like Stewart the freedom to air social and political grievances under the guise of entertainment with no real accountability. Baym (2010: 107) recognises another advantage of Stewart's use of satirical and comedic discourse, as it offers a measure of resistance to manipulation. Studying the media framing of the rally then is important because Stewart's ambiguous description courts confusion. Consequently this may have made it difficult for the news media to pin down a dominant way of framing the event.

Jon Stewart made it clear that it was a non-political, non-partisan event aimed at a particular segment of the American public, but he did not disclose anything about the content of the rally and how it would set out to achieve a more civil national

discourse. Speculation over what would happen on the day was not the only issue raised by fans and attendees. A series of factors including: the location of the rally, its proximity to the mid-term election, and Stewart's influential social commentator role caused people to question its apolitical intentions. The intrigue around the rally explains why it was important to examine the media's attempts to report it via the theoretical approach of media framing. Media framing is often used in the study of social movement representation in the news because it sheds light on whether such groups are reported fairly and accurately. Consequently, the manner in which these groups are framed can have a positive outcome for the issues that the protestors raise, or it can be detrimental to their success. This is because the media have the power to define the story and thus how it will be interpreted and understood by news audiences. Entman (1993: 52, 54) for example, argues that framing works to "present an event in a certain way through the exclusion of or selection of certain interpretations and issues over others". Gamson (2004: 245) adds further context to the methodological approach of framing, adding that:

> Like a picture frame it puts a boarder around something,
> distinguishing it from what is around it. A frame
> spotlights certain events and their underlying causes and
> consequences, and directs our attention away from others.
> A frame organises and makes coherent an apparently
> diverse array of symbols, images, and arguments, linking
> them through an underlying idea that suggests what is at
> stake on an issue

Applying media framing then was crucial to understanding how the media presented an event that lacked a clear definition of what it was, and how it would achieve its aims of bringing civility back to political discourse. Additional factors such as the ideological stance of media outlets, the culture of the news room environment, and the fact that Jon Stewart was directly targeting the news media could also influence the audience's interpretation of it. This is because the media are in a position to either; accept, change, challenge, incorporate, politicise and manipulate its intentions (Entman 1993: 52, 54). The remainder of this chapter will examine how the media presented news coverage of the Stewart rally, the quality of reporting and the themes and ideas that were present.

6.2 Part 1: Collection of Media Frames for the Rally to Restore Sanity

To provide a comprehensive and clear representation of the rally, this study examined how the media framed and made sense of it. This was achieved by analysing a sample of news articles taken two days before the rally, and two days after. The most popularly used frames were broken down into three distinct categories: politically motivated, popular culture and a hybrid frame that included both of these elements (see Table 6.2.1).

Table 6.2.1. Media Framing of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'

Media Frame	No. of Articles	Percentage
Politically motivated event	71	33.8%
Hybrid (pop culture/politically motivated event)	59	28.3%
Popular Culture event (including spoof rally)	48	22.8%
Speculation surrounding the event	14	6.7%
Cultural capital of Jon Stewart	9	4.3%
Criticism of Yusef Islam	3	1.4%
Rally smart phone app	3	1.4%
Rally as a charity event	1	0.5%
Crowd Estimation	1	0.5%
Rally as a global event	1	0.5%
Total articles =	**210**	**100%**

The most frequently used framing category were those that reported the rally as a 'politically motivated event'. This was followed by the second most frequently used frame 'hybrid event', and then the 'popular culture' frame; where journalists and other media contributors described the rally as a music concert, comedy event or a fun day out.

6.3 Politically Motivated Framing

Despite Stewart's insistence that the rally was non-political, and considering *TDS* is an entertainment show, it is significant that the media widely used a politically motivated frame to cover the event. But what is meant by this politically motivated definition? This frame consisted of a number of themes that were not inextricably linked to one another, but each was linked to the concept of politics in some way. Politics in this case is defined by issues that relate to the state, government, parties, partisan aspects of politics or issues of general interest to the public (Collins 2013). As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, while Stewart's description of the rally suggested that it was a 'non-partisan' event I, the researcher, felt that 'political event' was a more suitable description. This is because the rally requested citizen involvement and the subject matter of the event related to issues of public concern, for

example; to demonstrate that the American people are rational citizens and to improve the country's political dialogue. The 'politically motivated' frame then was used in instances that related to the rally's message and those that suggested that the rally was organised for other 'political reasons'. This included frames that reported it as an event that would 'encourage voting and political engagement', as an activist event for single issue politics, or as a call to action to improve political dialogue, and also as an event for liberal or left-leaning people to come together.

In this subcategory the most popularly used theme was that the rally would encourage voting and political engagement, as it was used in 13.9% of the sample articles. Parker writing for *US News* (2010) added that Democrats and their allies see it as a, "prime, if unusual chance to give their side an extra jolt three days before voters head to the polls". Similarly, Alberts (*Canwest News* 2010) reported that Democrats hoped the event would provide a, "much needed boost in an election where the party is expected to lose seats to the Republicans". It is probable that this was an easy association for the news media to make because the rally took place days before the Congressional mid-term election. As a result, this finding also demonstrates the inherent norms of contemporary news reporting around election time. According to Dahlgren and Sparks (1997: 12), this is an example of the media's fixation with horse race coverage which, in this case, was used to relate the rally story to who will win the election rather explaining the rally's purpose.

The second frequently used 'political' frame were those that reported the rally in relation to its core message: bringing civility back to political discourse. *The Associated Press* (Moore 2010) stated that the "overarching theme was to re-declare Americans' ability to get along and work together, regardless of their ideological differences". On *MSNBC* Alex Wagner (2010) stated that the rally was a "strident message of hope, it was a very genuine and almost soft-spoken plea for moderation". As well as incorporating the rally's message, some media outlets went one step further by also reporting the rally as a political activist event. *The Dallas Morning News* (Martin 2010) argued that the rally was an effort to showcase the silent majority who were fed up with the gaping partisan divide in modern politics. For example, "People came because they wanted to show their support for compromise" (Ibid). *The*

Irish Times (O'Dwyer 2010) were keen to point out how events such as this were a positive addition to regular practices of citizenship:

> Today's rally is designed to give a platform to the sort of people for whom public protest doesn't normally appeal. As Stewart put it, the rally is for people who would like to get out and march but don't have the time. The rise of the Tea Party rallies and today's response are evidence of the importance of public demonstrations…they are a reminder that the ballot box isn't the only way for the public to express itself.

What this section illustrates is that despite Stewart's ambiguous description of the rally, some media outlets chose to frame it as a 'political event', albeit in rather different ways. While a proportion of outlets made reference to the rally's underlying message of bringing civility back to political discourse, others used Stewart's vague depiction of the event to create other more speculative political frames. This included portraying it as either an activist or liberal event, or one that was organised to help garner votes for the Democrats.

6.4 Hybrid Framing

Another popular way in which to report the rally was as a 'hybrid event'. Hybrid reporting featured a combination of political and popular culture terms or phrases to describe the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. This included a range of values that could be accounted for such as; popular culture/activist event, or popular culture event with political undertones. On the surface these themes are quite similar, however they each present a slightly different perspective on how the rally was reported. The popular culture/activist frame, for example, referred to the rally as a comedic/music event that was also promoting political/social change i.e. more civilised political discourse. Frames that referred to the rally as a popular culture event with political undertones were slightly more ambiguous. They would refer to the comedy/music aspects of the event and how elements of the rally might be deemed political. In most instances the word 'politics' was used to partially describe the event, yet there was no explanation to demonstrate how it was 'political'. Other articles were more specific, as they used the term 'politics' to assert how the rally might be able to deflate the polarised state of American politics.

While this variable was used because it was frequently found in news coverage during the pilot analysis, it was also used because the term 'hybrid' has been used to describe political satire shows like *TDS*. According to Baym (2010: 18), hybrid describes the "intentional stylistic manipulation of form" and a "melding of the very conceptual systems that shape both media content and public discourse". This term certainly encapsulates the practices of *TDS*, as it manipulates the concept of traditional news programmes by mixing it with parody and comedy to produce a new breed of programming that offers new ways to talk about political and social issues.

The most frequently used theme within the 'hybrid event' category was the popular culture/activist rally frame, as it was used in 7.6% of cases. *The Independent on Sunday* (Foley 2010a), wrote that the crowd had responded to a call to arms from Jon Stewart to pack the National Mall for a mass gathering that was part comedy show, part plea to end the histrionics that had passed for political debate this year. Thus, rather than being framed as political, the media took into consideration the comedy elements of the rally too.

The second theme used within the 'hybrid event' frame was the slightly vague 'popular culture event with political undertones', which was featured in 7.6% of the articles. This ambiguous description was likely a reaction to Stewart's confused approach to describing the rally. As a result, the media may have responded with this vague approach to framing in an attempt to avoid inaccurate reporting of the event. Yen and Woodward (2010) provided very little information in their description of the rally only that there was a, "major comedy routine along with singing, but there were political undertones too". Even liberal *MSNBC* pundit Rachel Maddow's (2010a) summary of the event was ambiguous, as she described it as a "non-partisan, ironic, but not cynical, small liberal reset button for politics". Not reporting the rally accurately or in its correct context, may explain why some journalists took this non-committal approach. Although other contributing factors, discussed later in this chapter, including; confusion on how to report the event and questions of reporting the event objectively may also be responsible.

6.5 Popular Culture Framing

Table 6.5.1. Popular Culture Frames: Themes Present

Music/Comedy event	37.44%
Entertainment event	16.64%
Pseudo/Spoof event	10.40%
Comedy event	10.40%
Festival/Woodstock comparison	8.32%
Music event	6.24%
Party event	4.16%
Concert event	4.16%
Publicity stunt	2.08%
Total articles for Pop Culture frames	**100%**

Popular culture descriptions were the third most popular reporting theme used by journalists. Unlike the previous reporting approaches, popular culture is more self-explanatory because it has been used in this instance to account for stories where the media have not included any political descriptions of the rally. Thus, it was used when the rally was characterised as a music, comedy, party or festival event.

Stories framed as 'popular culture' were interesting because the rally's civility message was completely absent and the event was reinterpreted by media outlets. Most of the articles described it as an entertaining or a comedy/music orientated event. *Salon* (Williams 2010) described it as a, "haphazard state production featuring comedians and musicians". Also, Howard Kurtz (2010) on *CNN* referred to it as a, "three hours of music, comedy skits and funny costumes". While this approach to framing has left out some of the more politically significant elements of the rally, it certainly reflects Stewart's interpretation of it as a fun non-political event.

A number of articles compared the rally to the 1960s music festival Woodstock which, according to Street, (2004: 29) was a major political and cultural event united by its peace, anti-war and anti-authoritarian message. The rally reporters, however, used the Woodstock comparison in a slightly different context to Street's definition. In Tau and Hohman's (2010) *Politico* article they wrote that the rally could be this generation's Woodstock, but in the sense that it was largely apolitical. Similarly, Bunch (2010) signalled that the rally was a, "Woodstock moment for tribes of entertainment addled Americans based on attitude not action". These comparisons suggest that the rally was a non-political, entertainment based event for apolitical audiences, unlike Street who viewed the original event as politically and culturally significant. The comparisons do not end there when considering Street's (2004: 33,

35) journalistic analysis of Woodstock. He argued that it was as an ambiguous phenomenon because of the many different ways it was described by the media (Ibid). The same argument is applicable to the media's framing of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', because its hybrid mix of activist messages and popular culture appears to have perplexed journalists which may explain why such a wide variety of frames were used to report it.

Another theme obtained from the popular culture frame was the reporting of the rally as a 'pseudo' event. This term was used to account for frames that described the event as a spoof or pretend rally. While this may attribute negative connotations to the pseudo frame as unauthentic or a sham, here it was used in a similar way to the 'fake news' description of *TDS* which accounts for its satirising and parodying of traditional news reporting.

The pseudo frame was used by a variety of different media outlets. *CNN* (5: 2010) reported that Jon Stewart wanted to, "mock the over the top political rallies that had come before his". Similarly, *The Indian Express* (2010) wrote that the rally was, "almost unbearably meta, a rally that mocked the idea of serious political rallies and the reporting of it". Charles Krauthammer (2010) speaking on *Fox News*, also argued that the rally was a, "very post-modern event, a rally to mock rallies". What these quotes are attempting to communicate is that Jon Stewart applied the same format to the rally that he regularly uses on *TDS*. On TV he plays the role of fake news anchor to mock politicians and news outlets. But here, some media outlets suggest that the rally was a faux demonstration attempting to satirise other political rallies.

Journalists may have used this theme after careful research carried out before and during the rally. Prior to the event, Stewart (2010b) appeared on *Larry King Live* and said "we are just using the rally format to do what we do with our shows. We will be using the rally as a satirical format". Stewart even dedicated a section of the rally to how the national media normally report political rallies. He argued that there were two options for reporting on a rally: one that it was a tremendous success, the other that it was a horrendous failure. The screens then cut to *TDS* correspondent Wyatt Cenac who gave a positive report on the rally as a celebration of real Americans coming together. While another correspondent, Jason Jones delivered a contrasting

report that pre-empted violence from the crowd and under estimated the people in attendance. By utilising the 'pseudo' frame, the media were able to present what could be deemed an accurate approach to framing the rally that, in part, it was an event that satirised the culture of political rally events.

6.6 Before and after Framing

While the last section examined the collective framing of the rally and the themes that emerged, this section will focus specifically on the framing before and after the event took place. This is significant because the results demonstrate how differently the event was framed after the event had taken place. On first inspection the results in Table 6.6.1 do not show any major differences to those found in the collective framing analysis.

Table 6.6.1 Before & After Framing of the Rally

Media Frame	Before Rally	After Rally	Percentage
Political motivated event	16.3%	17.6%	33.8%
Hybrid (pop culture/politically motivated event)	6.2%	21.9%	28%
Popular Culture event (including spoof rally)	6.7%	16.2%	22.8%
Speculation surrounding the event	6.7%	0.0%	6.7%
Cultural capital of Jon Stewart	4.3%	0.0%	4.3%
Criticism of Yusef Islam	0.0%	1.4%	1.4%
Rally smart phone app	1.4%	0.0%	1.4%
Rally as charity event	0.5	0.0%	0.5%
Rally as global event	0.5%	0.0%	0.5%
Crowd estimation	0.0%	0.5%	0.5%
Totals	**42.6%**	**57.6%**	**100% Total**

This is because the most prevalent frames: politically motivated, hybrid and popular culture were still the most frequently used frames in which to report rally prior to the event taking place.

The politically motivated frames in Table 6.6.2 illustrate how the themes differ considerably before and after the rally. The 'voting Democrat' theme was the most prevalent in the before framing of the rally which was likely a result of the impending election. Yet, after the rally the media were more likely to frame it in relation to its message of advocating civil political discourse. This was perhaps a small victory for Jon Stewart because the news media had framed the rally in accordance with his original description of the event. The dramatic change in framing was conceivable in the aftermath of the rally, as it probably became obvious to journalists that the rally was in no way advocating or campaigning for Democrat votes. Consequently, this is

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why the media were more likely to frame the event in terms of how Jon Stewart had described it, rather than relating it to the mid-term election.

Table 6.6.2 Before/After Politically Motivated Frames

Frame	Before	After
Encourage voting & political engagement	10%	3.8%
Support the rally's message: civility in political discourse	2.4%	9.5%
Demonstration/Activist rally	2.9%	4.3%
Rally for liberal leaning citizens/advocates	1.0%	0.0%

There were also changes in the media's reporting of the other frequently used frames. Prior to the rally, journalists were less likely to frame it as a hybrid or popular culture event. However, reports published after the rally show that journalists and reporters altered their perception and indeed their summing up of the event. Table 6.6.1 shows that after the rally, the popular culture frame became a more accepted way of labelling it as the percentage increased quite dramatically. The same can also be said for the hybrid results frame. The media perception and consequential framing prove insightful, particularly after the event. This is because they were more in-keeping with Stewart's description of the rally, and also with some academic classifications of *TDS* as a hybrid format that uses comedy and critical challenge. According to Baym, (2010: 18) hybrid programmes like *TDS* emerged because of the heterogeneous culture we reside in where multiple voices overlap. This is a direct consequence of the post-network era which re-contextualized television, changing what it could do and under what conditions (Turner & Tay 2009:3) such as the mixing of both news and entertainment. The result is a programme like *TDS* which Baym (2010: 210, 127) argues is a hybrid style of oppositional news programming that uses humour to provide critical challenge.

The before and after framing results appear to be fuelled by media speculation surrounding the event and those that were in-keeping with both Stewart's description of the rally and Baym's hybrid perception of *TDS*. What is most telling is how interchangeable and closely linked these results are. Again, this maybe due to the media's uncertainty in reporting the satirical rally, what the event really set out to achieve and thus how it should be framed to the American people. Alternatively, it

could be an example of the increasing discursive forms[17] that are entering their way into the more traditional and regimented vision of what political journalism should be, and the uncertainty and reluctance journalists have in reporting them. Winch (1997) argues that journalists defend their role as the appropriate agent's presiding over the public discourse by invoking concerns that the mixing of entertainment and journalistic modes can have negative consequences on journalistic authority. Yet while Jon Stewart insists that his show is fake news, Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2009: 421) argues that this has not stopped parts of the public, academic and journalistic academy from treating Stewart and *TDS* as a trusted source of news. With continued confusion surrounding what Stewart's role is and his approach to reporting news, there is little wonder why some media outlets chose to report the rally in very different ways: some that were supportive of the rally's message and others that chose to reinterpret it.

6.7 Media Platforms & their Framing of the Rally

An important addition to the analysis of media framing are the types of news media that chose to cover the event, and the different styles in which they reported it. The research showed that of all the global media platforms covering the event, newspapers were the most prevalent, however this was because the sample gathered from LexisNexis over represented newspaper articles.

While newspapers produced the most coverage of the rally there was not much variation in the way it was reported. Table 6.7.1 shows that the same frames were consistently used by the other media outlets, a result perhaps of the ambiguity surrounding the rally and what it hoped to achieve.

Table 6.7.1 Framing Approach adopted by different Media Outlets

Frame	Papers	Cable	Agency	Mag	Online	Blog	Media org	Radio	TV
Pop Cult	19.3%	38.2%	5.8%	44.4%	14.28	31.5%	28.5%	33.3%	0%
Political	44.4%	5.8%	47%	22.2%	32.1%	31.5%	42.8%	16.6%	0%
Hybrid	23.9%	29.4%	41.1%	22.2%	35.7%	15.7%	28.5%	16.6%	100%
Cult capital of JS	5.7%	0%	0%	0%	10.71	0%	0%	16.6%	0%
Criticism of Yusef Islam	0%	1.1%	0%	0%	0%	10.5%	0%	0%	0%
Rally Smart Phone App	1.1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	10.5%	0%	0%	0%
Rally as Charity Event	0%	0%	0%	11.11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Rally as Global Event	0%	0%	0%	0%	3.5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Crowd Estimation	0%	0%	0%	0%	3.5%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Anticipation Comedy/Politics	5.7%	23.5%	5.8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	16.6%	0%

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[17] Increasing discursive forms refers to programmes (like *TDS*) that mix news politics and comedy. The consequence for journalists is that it becomes increasingly difficult for them to categorise such shows because they blur the lines of comedy and serious political talk.

For example, Table 6.7.1 shows that all traditional media outlets including newspapers, television, news agencies and radio speculated whether the rally would be a political or comedic event. This goes to show that Stewart's initial description of the event was not entirely clear which may have made it harder for journalists to pin down a specific way of framing it. Yet, despite the lack of clarity, it was interesting that traditional media outlets consistently used very similar ways in which to report it. This is unlikely a coincidence, but a result of the culture and current practices of the news industry which has led to what Murdock (1981: 217) has called the 'ideological convergence' of news. This is where the media, in an attempt to cut costs and avoid being scooped by other news outlets, will borrow stories printed from elsewhere (Ibid). The fear of being 'scooped' was unlikely a concern for journalists covering the rally because it was not an exclusive story. Instead journalists may have been more concerned about reporting a rally that did not have a fixed definition or objective.   Consequently, the results in Table 6.7.1 show that journalists may have responded by using a similar yet limited number of frames tried and tested by other media outlets to avoid any complicated characterisations of the rally, and to ensure its newsworthiness

6.8 Comparisons to the Glenn Beck Rally

At the beginning of this chapter it was argued that 'Rally to Restore Sanity' emerged as a response to the hyper-partisan rhetoric engulfing America's political communication. Satirising and drawing attention to lies, distortions and partisan hyperbole however, was already common practice for Jon Stewart in his role as *TDS* anchor. A regular target of his was the former *Fox News* pundit, Glenn Beck because of his emotive and fear inducing opinions that were passed off as real news. With Glenn Beck organising his 'Restoring Honour Rally' on the Washington National Mall in August 2010, followed by Stewart's announcement of his own rally a few months later, it was inevitable that comparisons would be made between both events. This was certainly the case in the media's framing of the Stewart rally, as 46.2% of the sample articles made reference to the event organised by Beck.

Articles that made reference to Beck were broken down into the subcategories found in Table 6.8.1.

Table 6.8.1. Defining Comparisons to GB Rally

Sub-Category	Related Definitions
Satirical responses	Rally was a liberal retort to Glenn Beck's conservative rally. Stewart's rally was satirising the spectacle of celebrity activism.
Success of both events	Which event garnered the biggest crowd? Which event was most successful in encouraging people to vote?
Similarities between both events	Both were apolitical events. Both rallies considered destructive to the democratic process.

Satirical responses was the most widely used subcategory, which was expected in light of the satirical nature of *TDS* and its lambasting of TV show's like Glenn Beck's. Some media outlet's used a more generalised approach to do just that, describing the event as simply a, "reaction to" and, "the counter weight to the Rally to Restore Honour", a "re-joiner to Beck's rally" or simply as a, "satirical poke at *Fox News* Pundit Glenn Beck's rally" (Elis 2010, Tavernise & Stelter 2010, Villarreal 2010). Other publications provided more definitive descriptions of how they viewed Stewart and Colbert's satirical reaction to the Beck rally.

Satirical Response No.1: Rally as a Liberal Retort

The satirical response frames were broken down into two themes. The first was that the rally was a liberal retort to Glenn Beck's Restoring Honour event. *ABC Australia* (2010) described it as a, "liberal reply to the rally held by the Tea Party's favourite conservative, Glenn Beck". And the *Independent on Sunday* (Foley 2010) wrote that the rally was conceived as, "liberal anti-venom to Glenn Beck's 'Restoring Honour rally". Other journalists delved further into this political comparison by framing both rallies as events that intended to boost support for the two major parties during the mid-term campaign season. Bunch (2010) for example, argued that the rally was an, "in your face response to the much hyped gathering that launched the fall election season; Augusts' Restoring Honour Rally". Baunch (2010) made a similar point in his article, adding that the liberal minded rally was intended as a spoof of Glenn Beck's 'pro-Republican' 'Restoring Honour Rally', and to inspire moderates to vote. Even though Jon Stewart routinely argued that the rally was not 'political' (Parker 2010, *The Herald Sun* 2010 & Carter & Stelter 2010), the media used the alleged

political affiliation of both shows' and their audiences to reaffirm the differences between them; those attending the Beck rally were Republican advocates, while Stewart's audience were in attendance to gather support for the Democrat Party.

Some media outlet's included a horse race approach in their comparison to establish which rally was more successful in garnering support for the two opposing parties. *The Christian Science Monitor* (Elis 2010) argued, in the run up to Stewart's rally, that it may out-mobilise those on the right and Mr Beck himself. In his after report of the event Foley (2010b) insisted that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' had "trounced Mr Beck, the mewling *Fox News* host who had brought Tea Partiers to Washington months earlier". By utilising themes of difference and political competitiveness to frame both rallies, the media could be accused of simply reinforcing the polarised views of both audiences which was something that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was attempting to highlight and dispel. Yet a more logical explanation for the Beck comparison could be that journalists saw it as a way of attributing balance and objectivity to their reporting of Stewart's allegedly 'liberal event'.

Satirical Response No. 2: Rally as Pseudo Response to Beck

Another evident frame was those that characterised the rally as a pseudo retort to Beck's event. This was largely because Glenn Beck's rally took place on the anniversary of Martin Luther Kings 'I have a dream' speech. In the *Independent on Sunday* journalist, Stephen Foley (2010a) wrote:

> When Beck organised his rally on the site and on the anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, Stewart mercilessly attached the demagoguery, and it was only a matter of time before the *TDS* team decided to head for the logical conclusion [their own rally].

Carter and Stelter (2010), writing for *The New York Times,* were also critical adding that, "To me, Stewart is almost saying, it's ludicrous that Glenn Beck has done this [rally] on the same spot as Martin Luther King and I can show how ludicrous it is by getting people to come from all over the country to watch me tell some jokes". By choosing to use the MLK anniversary date, Beck appears to be comparing himself and his rally to King and one of largest human rights rallies to take place in America. These examples may explain why the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was framed as a pseudo event because journalists believed it was drawing attention to the crude

spectacle of some contemporary rallies, and how they were also losing their effectiveness as tools of political action. Other exerts from the sample texts appear to support this logic as Chris Smith (*CNN*5 2010), Contributing Editor of *New York Magazine,* said on *CNN's American Morning Show* that, 'Stewart wanted to mock the generally sort of over the top political rallies". Leslie Savan (2010), writing for *Notion Magazine*, argued that the rally was, "theatre meant to critique theatre which was motivated by a revulsion for crude, over the top stagecraft used in conservative politics". While the latter part of Savan's argument is focused on the spectacle of conservative politics, it seems that it was not just popular conservative media figures that were using the location and date of King's speech as a media platform. On the same day regular cable news contributor, Al Sharpton held his own 'Reclaim the Dream' rally as a response to Beck's event. In addition, *MSNBC* TV personality, Ed Schultz held the 'One Nation Working Together' rally in early October that year. An event that was designed to, "counter the conservative tea party phenomenon" that made up a large proportion of the attendees at Glenn Beck's earlier rally (Thompson & Hsu 2010).

By making the Stewart/Beck comparison with the MLK anniversary the media have developed an interesting critique on contemporary activism. The critique associates Stewart and Colbert's pseudo rally with drawing attention to a culture of celebrity protest that is emptying rallies of their political importance to increase their own celebrity and audience ratings. Celebrity endorsement can be of major benefit to social movement and activist groups. Marshall (1997: 244) and Turner (2004: 85) state it can help crystallise issues and humanise institutions. It can also be a useful method in mobilising support for social movements, and to increase its publicity (Meyer 1995: 182). Yet by framing the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' as a satirical response to other celebrity endorsed rallies, the media are perhaps illustrating the limitations that this approach can have on the mobilisation and longevity of social movements. Indeed, this is an argument that has been raised in studies of celebrity and social movements. Lester (2007: 919) for example, found that celebrities can bring substantial gains in short-term publicity for social movements. Yet when played out over the long-term, the nature of the mediated conflict is reconfigured as the media regain control of the news agenda which reduces the power gained by the movement. Even if celebrities can bring more publicity to a specific cause it may not

always be of any real benefit to the movements' aims. Meyer (1995: 187) highlights this by indicating how demonstration events can be turned into a celebrity story. This can lead to coverage that drowns out the movements' message, or it leaves little space available for other people within the movement to critically engage with the issues via this media platform (Ibid). It is not just media coverage that can be destructive to a social movement's cause, but the actual inclusion of a celebrity. Meyer (1995: 201), for example, argues that audiences are aware that celebrities are profit making constructions thus they are often sceptical of their motives. As a result, this may lead to audience speculation and cynicism towards the celebrity rather than a discussion of the issues that the social movement want to publicise. By framing the rally as an event that satirises the concept of many contemporary demonstrations, the media drew attention to a number of arguments about the limitations of celebrity endorsement. Other media outlets however were not quite as complementary about the rally's intentions and its relation to the Glenn Beck event.

'Rally to Restore Honour' & 'Rally to Restore Sanity': Similarities
Some media outlets reported that, like the Glenn Beck rally, the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' would be detrimental to the concept of active citizenship. Bill Jenson (2010), for *Attywood Philadelphia Daily News,* for example wrote; "I see more similarities than differences between Beck and Stewarts rally's. Both events are Woodstock moments for tribes of entertainment addled American's based on attitude and not action". While Will Bunch (2010) writing for the *Guelph Mercury* added:

> American's are only coming out to march in the name of
> attitude over answers; they are parading their common
> bond to entertainment – whether it is Beck's god-tinged
> righteousness or the cool detachment of Colbert and
> Stewart – rather than making their position clear on
> specific policies, or heaven forbid, lobbying for them.

This frame draws many parallels with academic research on the effects of infotainment news on contemporary audiences. Baum (2003) and Baumgartner (2008) for example, recognise how infotainment can be essential to democracy because it can invigorate political interest. In contrast, Pippa Norris (2000: 3, 4) asserts that contemporary political communication in the news media is contributing to a 'media malaise' that actually hinders civic engagement because of widespread audience cynicism towards political institutions. Thus, while scholars such as Jones and Baym (2012: 6) may praise programme's like *TDS* for encouraging psychological

engagement with politics and the deconstruction of its hegemonic discourses the end result, according to the journalists quoted, is that it does not produce active or physical involvement in politics because audiences have become too cynical. While this is merely the opinion of two journalists quoted in this paragraph their argument has resonance with those made by Baumgartner and Morris (2006: 352), who argue that *TDS* is destructive to the democratic process because exposure to the show can leave audiences with a distinct lack of faith in the electoral system.

6.9 Summary of Section 1

The evidence in section 1 shows that a multitude of frames were used to characterise the rally and the most prevalent were those that depicted it as a 'politically motivated event'. These frames were broken down into distinct areas; those that saw the rally as an event that would encourage Democrats to vote in the mid-term election. The second involved framing the rally in relation to its civility message and how the event acted as an alternative platform for political engagement. While the rally's message was prevalent in news reports the journalists framing approach in fact challenges Jon Stewart's original characterisation of the event as apolitical. The voting frame in particular had no relation whatsoever to the rally's core message but this reinterpretation was probably used as a result of the impending election.

Interestingly, news frames that utilised the rally's civility message incorporated an additional angle to their reporting that went beyond Stewart's original intentions. For example, many viewed the rally as a mobilising platform for citizens to campaign against vitriol and dogmatism in political discourse. Thus, despite Jon Stewart's efforts to 'downplay' suggestions that this was a political or activism event, the news media did the exact opposite by emphasising its significance as a platform for both thin and thick demonstrations of active citizenship like voting and protest. This result supports the discussions raised at the beginning of this chapter which also characterised the rally as a political event in light of its request for citizen mobilisation and the political intentions of the events core message. The remainder of this chapter, however, will explore why there was very little quality and detailed reporting of this 'politically motivated' event.

6.10 Part 2: Absence of 'Detailed' Rally Reporting

Although the media attributed a largely 'politically motivated' framework to the reporting of the rally, much of the quantitative results that were gathered illustrated that there was a lack of detailed reporting in 84.3% of cases. Of course a term such as 'detailed' is quite subjective and different interpretations are evoked depending on what the term is applied to. Here, the term 'detailed' referred to articles that either featured or lacked detailed journalistic news reporting of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. To give a more precise and accurate interpretation of this term it is important to define what is meant by 'detailed'. *The Collins Dictionary* (2013) definition of 'detailed' means 'having many details or giving careful attention to details'. Other words to describe this adjective include extensive, thorough and meticulous (Ibid). The definitions of this term give a positive description of a particular action taken by someone and applied to a specific subject whether it is a scientific study or, in this case, a news article. For this study, 'detailed reporting' has been used to account for articles that provide a comprehensive account of the rally. This was indicated by those that reported the rally's purpose, interpretation or analysis of what happened at the event, interviews with at least 2 or more sources, and concluding thoughts (by the journalist or sources) or summing up of the effectiveness of the event. According to Merrill (1968: 20), by providing readers with a comprehensive account of a story that includes facts, ideas, and interpretation they will feel that they are getting a "synthesised look at the most significant aspects of the story".

By applying Merrill's argument to the news media's reporting of the rally it would appear that readers were not presented with all the significant aspects of the story. This was a theme that ran through much of the coverage that was analysed in the quantitative part of this study. The results of these other variables will be discussed in the next chapter. However, it is important to highlight here how other reported aspects of the rally lacked detailed media coverage, even though the event was described as a 'political' event.

An important component of the rally was the many thousands of participants that descended onto the Washington Mall that day. With over 250,000 people in attendance, the news media had ample opportunity to incorporate participant interviews, critiques and descriptions in their reporting. What can be gathered from

studying the sample news articles is that the news media may not have viewed the rallygoers as an integral part of reporting the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. For example, the media failed to describe the rallygoers in 40.2% of cases. Cottle (2006: 33) may disagree with the media's view of the rally as he argues that, in most public demonstrations or activist events, the media try to establish the frame in which to report the event. This may include a deconstruction of the protest message, but also reports on the people that attended too. Another area that the news media appeared to neglect was an understanding of why the participants decided to attend the event. By including this information this may have enabled the news media to give a broader understanding of why people identified with this ambiguous event, and whether their attendance was politically motivated or not. The results showed that in 56% of cases journalists did not ask the participants their reasons for attending the rally. While it was clear that the rally was championing the idea of civil political discourse, participants did not necessarily attend for this reason. From personal experience of attending the event, some people came to advocate other single protest issues such as the environment, pro-choice, gay rights and the legalisation of marijuana. With this in mind, the media had the opportunity to interview a wide range of political interest groups at a time of heightened political interest due to the impending mid-term election. Yet, the results show that the media rarely explored this avenue of investigation because 62.2% of the articles failed to make any reference to single issue advocacy groups even though the rally was framed as a 'political' event.

In contrast, there were a considerable amount of articles that featured interviews with observers or rally participants. However, in most cases, only one source was interviewed per article which is relatively low considering the amount of people in attendance.[18] On the whole what the results in this section illustrate is the lack of 'detailed' news reporting attributed to the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. Indeed there might not be any deep-rooted reason for this other than journalists felt that the event did not warrant extensive media coverage, particularly when the event was unclear about its intentions. The remainder of this chapter however will consider scholarly

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[18] On first inspection the results for the amount of sources that were interview appear quite high as 84.3% of the articles featured at least one source while 15.7% featured none at all This number could have been considerably higher though if more than once source had been interviewed.

debates that may account for other explanations regarding the absence of in-depth coverage of this politically and culturally significant event.

Scholars such as McNair (1998: 61) Gans (1979) Schudson (1978) Dahlgren and Sparks (1997) have written extensively on the practices of journalism and how journalistic work is structured and shaped by a variety of practices, conventions and ethical norms. Furthermore, a journalists' work is also subject to constraints and limitations imposed on them by complex production processes and the commercial imperatives they have to adhere to. The following section of this chapter will examine some of these areas and how they may have contributed to the style of media reporting that covered the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'.

6.11 Debating Journalistic Practice: Balance & Objectivity

One factor that governs journalistic practice and which may have contributed to the lack of detailed reporting on the rally is the notion of balance and objectivity. Because the mid-term election occurred days after the rally, some news outlets may have avoided dedicating too much time to covering what could be deemed a 'politically liberal event'. While Jon Stewart may have refuted this notion, the empirical data gathered in the first section of this chapter illustrates that the media thought otherwise with some banning their staff from attending and reporting the event. *NPR* for example, sent a memo to its staff advising them that the rally was politically ambiguous, thus they should not attend (Freeman 2010). *NBC* and the *New York Times* took a similar editorial stance, as they considered the rally a serious political event, thus they did not want questions raised about their impartiality if their staff attended (Ibid). Indeed, these examples only make reference to the preventative measures put in place by news organisations to stop their staff from participating at the rally. Nevertheless, their actions may also be indicative of the lack of detailed reporting because if too much time had been dedicated to the rally coverage this may have suggested a potential liberal bias.

The premise of objectivity can be used as a valid argument to justify the media's reporting of the rally. Moreover, it also relates to Gans (1979) thoughts on how news stories are selected and reported. Gans (1979) cites 'value exclusion' as integral to the practices of journalism because it involves the conscious exclusion of values

through objectivity. Consequently this may also lead to a disregard for implications or the rejection of ideology (Ibid). He argues that it is important, or at times necessary, for journalists to adopt a 'value exclusion' approach because it safeguards journalistic integrity and defends them against actual or possible criticism (1979: 183. 186). The absence of detailed rally coverage then might have been a result of journalistic 'value exclusion'. It is likely that this role was adopted so that news organisations would avoid criticism for dedicating too much coverage to a liberal event so close to the mid-term election.

News Values

Naturally, the rally's absence of in-depth reporting could also be explained by other scholarly arguments that relate to the practices of contemporary journalism. It may have simply been an issue of its newsworthiness for example, Hall et al (1978: 118) cite that news values employed by journalists in the selection and construction of stories can be seen, not as the neutral expression of professional practice, but as ideologically loaded. On the surface, the use of the phrase 'ideologically loaded' may suggest a political bias on the part of news organisations for covering the rally. Yet in McQuail's (2000: 497) definition of ideology, he refers to it as a belief system or set of values that is disseminated or reinforced by communication. In this case, the rally's close proximity to the mid-term election may have resulted in less in-depth media coverage because election related news was deemed more important. This is certainly a valid argument given that news organisations should adhere to their fourth estate role and act as a watchdog that monitors and scrutinises the powerful. This role is considered vital to the practice of a well functioning democracy as Blumler and Gurevitch (1995: 97) argue that it enables citizens to learn, choose and become involved in the political process. Thus, the media's decision to provide little in-depth rally coverage might not be an indicator of poor journalistic work. Instead it is an example of the media dedicating more time to newsworthy election related stories that would better serve the interests of the American public.

Evidence relating to objectivity and news values indicates that the media's lack of detailed reporting was a result of normative practices that journalists adhere to in their line of work. There are other contributing factors however that may have led to this type of coverage. The de-regulation of media ownership experienced after the

relaxation of the FCC doctrine in the 1980s has also impacted on the way news is reported. It has contributed to a commercialised model of news journalism that is 'ratings-driven' (Baym 2010: 3), and constructed by market factors. Consequently, this has led to drastic budget cuts in both news content and media employment and led to a rise in entertainment and tabloid driven news (McChesney 2003: 309, Kellner 1990: 74). The next section will explore whether the contemporary commercial model of news may have also contributed to the lack of coverage of the rally event.

Economic Imperatives of News

Political economy scholars, Kellner (1990) and McChesney (2003) have written extensively about market pressures and how the relaxation of media regulation has negatively impacted on journalism practice. One of the changes relates directly to the economic imperatives of the news, as media organisations attempt to save money and generate revenue. This has led to major cut backs in resources and employment as the number of journalists working in the industry has dropped dramatically (McChesney 2003: 308, 2012, 616). Despite cuts in employment, news is more available than ever which is evident through the culture of 24-hour news and the increase of online news resources. The combination of the reduction in journalism employment but the increase in story output is a prime explanation that accounts for the rally's lack of detailed reporting. For example, according to Franklin et al (2010: 203), the current media climate has transformed journalists into mere processors rather than originators of news. This is because journalists today rarely have the resources and time to actively seek out news.

There are a number of explanations that can account for this: cost cutting, reducing journalistic staff while increasing journalistic output has turned the news room environment into a news factory (Davies 2008: 73). The implication of this business strategy is that journalists have become desk bound because they have little time to go out and make contacts and follow leads (Ibid). Consequently, this has made them reliant on key information that is readily available to them (McChesney 2003: 30). Davies (2008: 73) calls this process 'churnalism', whereby journalists passively process information that is supplied to them from outsiders, particularly wire agencies and PR. This was a trend that was evident earlier in this chapter, where it highlighted similar framing approaches used by different media platforms and how this drew

parallels with Murdock's (1981: 217) argument on how journalists borrow and steal stories printed from elsewhere to cut costs. This is also applicable to the lack of detailed reporting of the rally, as 61% of regional papers incorporated news agency material from *Canwest* and *Associated Press* in their articles. Interestingly, this was a trend only found in regional newspapers thus, unlike the cable news networks and national newspapers, they may not have had the financial resources to report the rally from Washington and give a detailed account of the event.

Ambiguity & Confusion in Framing the Rally

Factors such as journalistic objectivity, lack of resources and the commercial imperatives of news are all reasonable justifications for the framing and lack of in-depth reporting of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. The final reason to be examined relates to a common theme found throughout this chapter; that the news coverage was a result of the ambiguous nature of the rally and the contested definitions that surrounded it. The media were likely perplexed and unsure of how to report the event because it did not fall into the normal conventions of demonstration and protest reporting. To examine this argument further it is important to consider two classic studies of demonstration reporting: Graham Murdock's (1981) and Todd Gitlin's (1980) analysis of the student demonstrations against the Vietnam War because, according to Cottle (2006: 33), the media's approach to reporting these events have become uncritically accepted features of demonstration news reporting. Murdock (1981: 210, 214, 215) for example, found that anticipation of violence, and the inclusion of theatre and spectacle in reporting meant that the demonstration was emptied of its political message. Gitlin's (1980: 27, 28) research also highlighted a number of disparaging media frames including: trivialisation of the movement's message, emphasis on the internal disagreements of the movement, under-counting the number of people present at the protest, and belittling the movements effectiveness. Of course there are distinct differences between the Vietnam War protests and the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. Unlike the rally that was a one off event, the anti-war movement continued to grow in strength and media prominence throughout the 1960s. Also, in contrast to the rally, the war movement maintained a series of clear political objectives including: terminating compulsory enlistment of people into the military and ending America's intervention in Vietnam. Consequently, the standardised frames described by Murdock and Gitlin support the idea that, in the

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case of the rally, the media may have been unsure on how to report it because Jon Stewart routinely argued it was a non-political demonstration. As a result, the rally did not fall into the conventional frameworks evident in standard protest reporting. This is because it could not be linked to commonly used news values such as pre-empting violence, trivialising the movement's message and reporting internal struggles in protest groups, which, in turn, made it difficult to frame and report.

It is only when reference is made to the theatre and spectacle of the rally via its use of comedy and celebrity that it draws comparisons to previous demonstration reporting. Spectacle has been a staple element of news reporting for some time. It was present in the reporting of the Vietnam demonstrations and, according to Deluca and Peeples, (2002: 145) it continues to be used by modern day protestors in an attempt to gain media coverage and draw attention to a social movements message. In her analysis of satirical activism, Amber Day (2011: 148, 149) argues that comedy and satire have become contemporary forms of protest spectacle because they help groups capture attention and media access. The use of spectacle then can be integral to the success of protest movements because it provides media access and the opportunity to mobilise citizens (Gitlin 1980: 215). Unlike most protest groups, the hosts of the rally were already successful media figures. This meant they could utilise their own celebrity and media platform [the *TDS* programme] to publicise the rally and garner public support. In most circumstances, a protest group might find it difficult to obtain media access, particularly if they are criticising powerful institutions like the media who control the flow of information through this channel. Stewart and Colbert however, were already renowned celebrities, thus, unlike many social movements they were not reliant on the news media to push their message. Instead they were able to bypass this method of publicity and utilise their own media platforms to communicate their message and mobilise citizens to their cause.

Having the resources to avoid dependence on the news media for publicity did not necessarily benefit the rally's underlying message and intentions in a broader sense. Instead its efforts may have been limited to mobilising the show's audience and communicating the rally's message effectively via its own media platforms. Naturally the rally story was picked up by the mainstream news media because of its proximity to the mid-term election, but most importantly because of the spectacle and celebrity

associated with such an event. These factors do not necessarily indicate success for protests and demonstrations. Cottle (2006: 48) argues that there are inherent risks that demonstrators run when captivating the media spotlight. This is because the use of spectacle, which in the case of the rally would be celebrity or entertainment, can lead to the media emptying out the political arguments at the heart of the demonstration (Ibid). As discussed earlier, the inclusion of celebrity can be problematic for social movements. Meyer (1995: 187) argues that it can work against the movement's aims because the media may reinterpret it as a celebrity story which drowns out the demonstrations message. The arguments put forward by Cottle and Meyer draw many parallels with the news media's reporting of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. This is because, unlike Deluca's and Peeples (2002) study where the use of spectacle encouraged the media to discuss the Seattle protestors aims and grievances, the use of spectacle in this instance led to a lack of detailed coverage and only a small proportion of articles (11.9%) that framed the rally in relation to its core message: encouraging civil political discourse.

6.12 Conclusion

The dominant theme evident throughout this chapter was the ambiguous nature of the rally and how it lacked a clear definition from its organisers which made it difficult to pin down its intentions. Initially it was argued that the rally could be considered a 'political' event like other demonstrations because it was highlighting a political issue relating to matters of public concern. These concerns were related to the extreme partisan discourse used by politicians, their supporters and journalists. Considering this issue in relation to the collective action framework used in social movement studies, the rally could be characterised as a demonstration because it was able to define an issue worth protesting for (Snow & Benford 1992: 137). From then on however, definitions of what the rally was and what it hoped to achieve became confused. For example, Stewart repeatedly denied it was a political event, but instead an alternative platform of his show (Yen 2010a) where people could get together for fun, special guests and great conversation (Stewart 2010b). This, and the fact that Stewart used his satirical wit to play down the rally and its supposed intentions meant that there was great confusion over how to define this hybrid event.

The results gathered from the news media analysis showed that it was predominantly framed as a 'political' event. The most frequently used political frame linked the rally to the impending election and how it would encourage Democrats to vote. Indeed, this was a result that neither reflected the potential activism intentions of the rally nor Stewart's advocacy of developing a more civil tone in the country's political dialogue. Given its proximity to the election however it is understandable that the media would report the event in accordance with conventional understandings of institutional politics like voting. There were instances where media frames articulated the rally's civility message which demonstrated that manipulation of the rally's message or its intentions were not endemic in journalistic framing of the event.

In sum, these findings challenge Stewart's apolitical description of the event. Furthermore, they also challenge Baym's (2010: 107) argument that Stewart's use of satire offers a measure of resistance to manipulation. In this case, Stewart's conflicting descriptions of the rally, from its serious underlying message to his light-hearted promotion of it, did not prevent the media from adding their own meaning to the event. In fact it encouraged them to add entirely new interpretations to the rally that, in some cases, were completely unrelated to its original intentions.

While politically motivated frames were the most frequent characterisation of the rally a wealth of other frames were also used that depicted the rally as a popular culture, activism and comedic event. Sometimes the frames combined all three of these elements which were accounted for in the hybrid section of this chapter. Because it was considered a satirical event, the rally also drew many comparisons to Glenn Beck's rally that came before it thus, it was inevitable that the media framing would follow suit. Indeed, journalists were keen to formulate a horse race rhetoric that pitted each event against one another. Some, however, used the comparison to open up a debate on the perils of infotainment, with some praising Stewart for satirising the culture of celebrity protest. In contrast, others described both Stewart and Beck's rallies as destructive to the very concept of activism by arguing that their audience prefer malaise over political action.

What can be gathered from the wealth of media frames used to characterise the rally is that they reflect the ambiguous nature of the event discussed at the beginning of this

chapter. This was evident in before and after interpretations of the rally as the interchangeable results suggested an uncertainty on the journalist's part regarding how to report it. This uncertainty was also evident when examining the framing approaches adopted my different media outlets. Indeed, while the frames were varied, the more prominent outlet such as newspapers and television tended to reproduce the same style of framing. A consequence perhaps of confusion in how to report this ambiguous event which resulted in journalists borrowing tried and tested frames used by other news outlets.

The multifaceted nature of the rally was not unexpected given that *TDS* programme also incorporates a variety of genres and subject areas. Jones (2010: 210) for example, highlights how the show offers appealing narratives that can engage citizens far beyond conventional news programming. It is the shows multiple narratives that have led to a wealth of academic and journalistic inquiry (Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2009, Carlson & Peifer 2013) because it defies conventions by crossing the boundaries of satire, journalism and politics. Given that the rally also adopted a variety of narratives this shows how it also worked in a similar fashion to the *TDS* programme by blurring the boundaries of comedy and politics. However, rather than defying the conventions and boundaries of journalism (Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2009: 419, Baym 2010: 18) the rally was able to challenge ideas of how traditional political rallies are played out.

Thus far the conclusion has summarised and accounted for the varied approach the media took in their framing of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. In addition, the empirical data showed that many of the articles lacked a detailed analysis of the event. The norms and conventions of journalism, the commercial imperatives of news and general confusion in how to report this multifaceted event are all valid explanations that account for the lack of detailed coverage of the rally. But, unlike other demonstration movements this event was less reliant on traditional news outlets for publicity which may also account for the lack of detailed coverage. This is because Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert were able to use their own media and celebrity platforms to help mobilise public support and frame the rally as they saw fit.

The results in this chapter provide some insight into the media's reporting and framing of this ambiguous event. It does however, raise further questions particularly

about those attending the rally, how they identified with it and what they hoped it would achieve. The following chapter will focus specifically on these areas by examining the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' attendees and their reasons for attending the event.

Chapter 7: The Rally Attendees: Who Were They & What Did They Want?

Introduction

The previous chapter intended to understand how an ambiguous event like 'The Rally to Restore Sanity' was framed by the news media. This chapter will continue with a similar theme by examining, through media analysis, ethnography and interviews, who the rally attendees were and what motivated their attendance. These are important questions given the multiple ways in which the rally was framed by the media in the previous chapter from its advocacy towards the Democrats, the comparisons with Glenn Beck's rally, and its similarities to Woodstock. Questions were also raised about the type of people that might engage with an event such as this. Scholars and the media alike have questioned the type of people that constitute *TDS* audience with some arguing that they are well educated and politically engaged liberals (Feldman & Goldwaite-Young 2008) and others labelling them as cynical (Baumgartner & Morris 2006) or stoned college slackers (PR Watch 2014). This chapter intends to provide a more comprehensive view of the type of people that engage with hybrid satire and consider whether their attendance at the rally was politically motivated, just for fun, or a combination of both.

The first part of this chapter will examine who the rally participants were by focusing on the dominant media frames that were used to describe them. This will be analysed alongside ethnographic field notes of the rally and interview responses to provide a detailed picture of the rally attendees. This will include examples of how the media framing undermined the image of the participants by presenting them as an ineffective group that lacked a coherent political message and strategy.

Section 2 will explore the representation of active citizens at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and political participation in general. This will include an analysis of their citizenship practices and the forms of participation they tend to avoid. Evidence gathered in this section shows how thicker forms of participation, such as talking politics were actively avoided by the rallygoers. This result illustrates traits of cynicism and hypocrisy in the attendees, particularly for those who embraced the rally's message of civil non-partisan communication.

Section 3 of the chapter examines the participants' reasons for attending the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. This includes those who advocated the rally's civility message, those who wished to be with like-minded individuals and those that attended simply for fun. By analysing these responses alongside social movement research this section identifies a number of interesting conclusions, the first of which shows that the attendees' presence was not a demonstration of 'thick' citizenship or activism. Instead their role at the rally replicates the role they adopt when watching *TDS* programme: supporting Jon Stewart in his citizen surrogate role while he holds the media and political world accountable.

7.1 Expressions of Citizenship

The last chapter found that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was largely perceived by the news media as a political event. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore whether the rally participants also viewed it as a political event and whether their attendance was a demonstration of this. Political participation as an expression of active political citizenship was discussed at length in the first literature review chapter. That chapter surmised that citizenship is a fluid concept that takes different forms. One such form is a 'thin' demonstration of participation that entails minimal transactions such as voting (Tilly 1995: 8). Citizenship can also be practised via 'thick' methods that "occupy a significant share of all the transaction rights and obligations sustained by state agents and people living under their jurisdiction" (Ibid). Put simply, 'thick' demonstrations of citizenship go beyond minimal transactions such as voting and instead place greater emphasis on other methods of involvement. This can include deliberation with other citizens about political issues that should be discussed in an honest and open-minded way (Coleman & Blumler 2009: 4). It can also be an attempt to influence or change public policies, which can range from putting up posters, to joining a political party or pressure group, or demonstrating in the streets (Ibid).

Attendance at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' draws comparisons with Coleman and Blumler's (2009) latter example of active citizenship via protest and demonstration. But, as described in the previous chapter, the rally was neither an activist nor demonstration event in the traditional sense because of the satirical, non-partisan and popular culture elements that the event incorporated. This is not to dismiss the idea that the rally was a political event and that people attended for the same reasons. Norris (2002), Coleman and Blumler (2009) and Eliasoph (2000) all indicate that

rigid definitions of politics and utopian ideas of citizenship may not be applicable in contemporary liberal democracy. According to Schudson, (1998: 294) contemporary society is experiencing the emergence of new definitions of politics whereby personal and social issues are now characterised as political issues. Norris (2002) makes a similar assertion about active citizenship as new patterns and alternative forms of engagement such as cultural movements and single-issue activism are on the rise.

The 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was an interesting mix of traditional and contemporary ideas of politics and civic participation. It was traditional in that it used a demonstration and activist platform to encourage Americans to support the idea of civil political discourse. But it also catered for some of the new and emerging forms of politics and participation as well as addressing some of the issues that may instigate political malaise. When promoting the rally in an interview with Larry King, Jon Stewart stressed that it was an event for people that were generally too busy to attend political rallies because they had jobs and other commitments (Stewart 2010a, 2010b). His statement and the rally's inclusion of comedy and music meant that the event might have been a less daunting space for people who might not have associated themselves with 'thick' aspects of civic participation but who still wanted to be politically active. Amber Day (2011: 145) has also been keen to point out new and emerging forms of political participation such as activism, which utilises irony and humour. She argues that it is becoming an increasingly successful engagement method that can unite discursive communities and turn those communities into actively politicised ones. Thus, the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' may in fact draw parallels with Baum's (2003) 'gateway' hypothesis in that the event may have encouraged or instigated further engagement with other modes of political participation.

In the last chapter, the rally was labelled as an ambiguous event in the light of its multiple meanings, which include its civility message, its association with garnering support for the Democrats during the mid-term election, and its disassociation with politics. As a result, this gave the rally participants the freedom and opportunity to attend and/or participate in many different ways, whether this was in supporting the rally's original message, garnering support for the mid-term election, or to supporting single-issue political ideas including the environment and gay rights. Alternatively,

their attendance might not have been politically instigated at all as the popular culture aspects of the event meant that some might have attended purely out of intrigue or because they were fans of *TDS*. By utilising framing analysis, ethnographic research and interviews with those that attended, it is the aim of this chapter to examine who the rally attendees were and whether their attendance was politically motivated.

7.2 Part 1: Who were the Rally Participants?

At public demonstrations where citizens illustrate their collective disagreement or support for a political or social issue, the media, in most instances, attempt to establish the frame in which the event is publicised (Cottle 2006: 33). Another aspect that the media also publicise and frame in this type of coverage is the people that take part. This chapter, like the previous one, also uses content and framing analysis of media coverage to determine how the rally participants were framed. Table 7.2.1 provides a break down of the different ways in which the attendees were described by the media. In the vast majority of cases the media did not include framing descriptions of the attendees in their coverage of the event. This trend was examined in the previous chapter, where it was established that there was very little detailed news reporting of the rally. The lack of time that the media spent covering the rally attendees, then, might also have been a consequence of this. Alternatively, the media may have refrained from framing or stereotyping the attendees because, unlike most protest events, the rally was a rather ambiguous affair that lacked a clear call for action in contrast to traditional protest events.

Table 7.2.1 Media Descriptions of the Rally Attendees

Media Description	Number of people	Percentage
No description	193	46%
Political outlook	80	19.1%
Age	49	11.7%
Fancy dress costumes	23	5.5%
Activists	16	3.8%
College educated	15	3.6%
Fans	15	3.6%
Politically engaged	12	2.9%
Well behaved	5	1.2%
Race	4	1%
Fun	4	1%
Politically disenchanted	3	0.7%

7.3 Liberal Leaning Citizens Framing

Table 7.2.1 also shows that the most frequently used description bestowed on the attendees was their political outlook. This was used as a way of describing their political affiliation to a particular ideology or political party. When broken down into

smaller sub-categories the results indicate that the most popular way of describing those in attendance was as 'left-leaning' citizens. Tavernise and Stelter (2010) writing for *The New York Times* stated that the "participants were overwhelmingly liberal. The *Tampa Bay Times* also added that when speaking to rally participants "many admitted they fall on the liberal side of politics" (Deggans 2010). As *TDS* is considered a politically liberal show (Young & Tisinger 2006: 126) with a largely liberal audience, it is little wonder that the rally participants were affiliated to left-wing politics.

To prevent this study from being too reliant on just media framing, this chapter also incorporates the field notes from the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. From my experience I would have to agree with the media's perception of the participants being largely left-leaning. While my experience of the event might only take into consideration certain segments and geographical areas of the rally site, I did get a strong sense that it was a predominantly liberal crowd. For example, a number of attendees wore their Obama 'Change' t-shirts from the 2008 Presidential election. This of course is only one example. Thus to obtain a more comprehensive view of the rally attendees this study also interviewed 30 people who attended the rally to gain an additional perspective on the event from their point of view.

A large proportion (19 out of the 30) of those interviewed identified themselves as liberal even though they were not asked this question. Some openly declared their liberal stance such as William Rodgers[19], who asserted when asked about his news source preferences, "I'm liberal so I prefer liberal Talk Radio". While some interviewees like William were more candid about their political affiliation, others indicated their support for left-leaning politics through examples of civic participation. Deborah Chatham[20] for example added, "…I went and canvassed for President Obama and would go into communities that were not necessarily pro-Obama because I wanted to hear what other people had to say". The remaining 11 interviewees who did not disclose their political outlook may also have identified themselves as conservative. Likewise, there may also have been right-leaning citizens at the rally that the media did not account for. Nevertheless, the picture presented by

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[19] Research interview with William Rodgers 16 February 2013.
[20] Research interview with Deborah Chatham 10 February 2013.

the media and the results gained from the qualitative analysis suggest that those that attended the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' were citizens who identified with left-wing politics.

The media's decision to report the attendees as left-leaning could be linked to the overall framing of the rally discussed in the previous chapter where it was perceived by the media as an event that would encourage Democrats to vote in the mid-term election. However, utilising this framing approach might also have been an attempt to undermine both the rally and the attendees' reasons for participating. Thus far, the research presented in this thesis has surmised that the rally's core message was to instigate a more civil form of political communication. Also, as discussed later in this chapter, many of the people that attended the event did so because they identified with the message that the rally was advocating. Yet, many of the quotes gathered from the newspaper analysis show that, in a number of instances, the political outlook frame was used to associate the attendees with garnering support for the election. *The Edmonton Journal,* for example, stated that, "Democrats who make up the largest segment of Stewart's audience are hoping the event will provide a much needed boost in the mid-term election" (Alberts 2010b). Utilising this frame associates the attendees' engagement with the event as support for the Democrat Party, which, as a result, diverts attention away from the rally's core message and non-partisan intentions.

The left-leaning frame was also used as a way of associating the people in attendance with stereotypical traits of left-wing politics and political movements. *Agence France Press* (2010) for example, wrote that, "the event has become an assertion of left-wing values". Framing the rally in relation to 'left-wing values' connotes its opposition to conservative ideologies, which, according to Wilkin (2010: 29), espouses ideas that rationality through human action is limited and that human beings are driven by appetite, emotion and prejudice. In contrast, liberal politics is concerned with collective responsibility rather than individualism and is an ideology of how the world should be and how it requires the state to engineer the realisation of these ideals (Wilkin 2010: 29). A large proportion of social movements are associated with left-wing politics because their aims embody social equality, global justice and changes in current social and political practices. This was the case with the civil rights

movement and anti-Vietnam movement in the 1960's and it is also the case with the environmental and anti-corporate globalisation movements of today. News coverage of activist groups, according to Gitlin, (1981: 27) is often undermined by a series of reoccurring frames which include trivialisation that makes light of the dress, style and goals of the movement and polarisation, in order to highlight the movement's opposition to right-wing politics. Gitlin's examples certainly show similarities to the media's reporting of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' because of how the event and its attendees were immediately associated with left-wing politics. Also, as discussed in the previous chapter, by framing the rally as an event that advocated Democrat voting an emphasis was placed on the divide between the two political parties, something that the non-partisan rally was trying to avoid.

The ethnographic evidence of a predominantly liberal turnout at the rally, accompanied by media reports of the event, might also have undermined what Jon Stewart had originally intended the rally to be. Stewart (2010a) asserted that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was a non-partisan event aimed at people on both sides of the political spectrum who were tired of the extreme political divide that America was experiencing. However, Stewart's attempts to gather a bipartisan crowd would have been extremely difficult to achieve for two reasons. First, much of the publicity surrounding the event took place on *TDS* and *The Colbert Report*, both of which have a predominantly liberal following. Second, according to the Pew Research Centre (2009b), who have studied the contemporary viewing habits of American audiences, conservative audiences tend to migrate towards right-leaning media outlets, while liberal audiences largely gravitate towards left-leaning media. Thus despite Stewart's non-partisan objective, it would seem that the polarised viewing habits of many American audiences would have resulted in a largely liberal gathering of rally participants.

7.4 Age Framing

The media also frequently described the rally attendees in relation to their age, with the most popular description being that there were mainly 'young people' in attendance. The *Independent on Sunday* for example, wrote that, "a mainly young crowd had responded to a call to arms from Jon Stewart" (Foley 2010). *Fox News* (2010b) also asserted that, "a huge crowd described as youthful trekked to

Washington for the unusual gathering". The media may have used this description because of established perceptions of *TDS* audiences being young. This is supported by research gathered by the Pew Research Centre (2012), which found that younger audiences between the ages of 18-29 were more likely to watch *TDS* compared to older people. Similarly, research on cable audience figures carried out by Quancast (2014) found that *Comedy Central's* audience[21] demographic was largely those aged between 18-34.

The turn out of what the media perceived to be a largely 'young' demographic was not simply a result of *TDS*'s place on the cable channel *Comedy Central*: other cultural factors might also have been at work. The increasing popularity of the show among young people has been identified by scholars such as Graber (2001) as a cultural change in how young people relate to political communication. Graber (2001: 442) found that young people today have been saturated with negative news for most of their adolescent and adult years, which has left them with feelings of disdain towards the news media and politicians. According to Baym (2010: 2) and Wolf (2010), this has led to young people abandoning traditional news media outlets in favour of alternative news sources like *TDS* because they are personally relevant, dramatic and entertaining. Consequently, the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' might have acted as an alternative venue of political participation for the younger demographic that was present. If this were the case, it would support Day's (2011:145) discussion on the popularity of new and emerging forms of political participation such as activism which utilises irony and humour.

While 'young people' might have been the most frequently used description of the attendees' ages, my field research found that the 'mixed age' label was the most accurate way to describe the rallygoers.   Experiencing the rally first hand, it was evident that there wasn't a specific age demographic present. Instead there was a mixture of people including: children, young adults, middle aged people and senior citizens. This point was also raised by many of the interviewees as 22 out of the 30 respondents mentioned age when discussing their impression of the crowd. Of the 22 respondents, 20 felt that the crowd was mainly of mixed ages. One of the

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[21] The Channel that airs *The Daily Show*

interviewees, Rita McCarthy, who identified herself as within the 60 plus age bracket, commented:

> There were a lot of college kids, even people with little kids there,
> but there were also a lot of older people. Bill O'Reilly always says
> that Jon Stewart's demographic are dope smoking kids but from
> what I saw there were a lot of middle aged people and people older
> than myself (Interview 24.1.2013).

Rita's statement along with my own experience and interpretation of the crowd are significant because, as discussed earlier, *TDS* is generally thought to have a largely young audience. This idea is also present in much of the *TDS* research as scholars such as Baumgartner and Morris (2006), Rottinghaus et al (2008), Feldman (2007), Young and Tisinger (2006) and Baym (2010) have focused much of their research on how young people identify with hybrid satirical news programming. The show's association with the young, however, could actually be changing as Pomerantz (2009) asserts that while Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert often refer to their audiences as dorm-living pot smokers, in reality their average viewer is likely to be a hard working father, or a retiree. A similar finding is evident in Pomerantz and Forbes research (Ibid) which found that, since 2009, the number of people aged between 18-34 watching *TDS* fell by 14%. Yet, at the same time, the number of people older than 55 that watch it rose by 25% (Ibid). This result, along with the interpretation of the rally crowd and other examples to follow, signals a gap in the research regarding late night political satire because it is not just young people that identify with *TDS*.

Describing the rally attendees as 'young people', again, may have been an attempt by the media to delegitimise the rally and the people who identified with it.   This is because the combination of young people and politics creates a series of negative connotations. Scholars such as Graber (2001) have highlighted how many young people today have become cynical towards the political system because of the negative and heavily commercialised news they have grown up with. Feelings of apathy and cynicism are also applicable to news watching habits as Buckingham (2000: 1) argues that young people are now less interested in news than ever before. While Buckingham's research might be considered outdated, research carried out by the Pew Research Centre found that the 18-31 year old demographic are still less likely than those in older age brackets to follow the news (Kohut 2013). These

findings, coupled with other stereotypes associated with youth, such as immaturity and laziness and more specifically, depictions of *TDS* audiences as "stoned slackers"[22], presents a negative interpretation of the type of young people who attended the rally. While his work has no relation to *TDS*, Gitlin (1981: 27) appears to support this argument in relation to age representation. For instance, in his work on the repertoires of social movement framing, he argues that references made to the age of the participants can be used as a way of trivialising and making light of the movements intentions (Ibid).

By framing the rally participants as 'young people' the media might have undermined those attending the rally because of the negative connotations relating to youth and political participation. This style of framing might suggest to news audiences that this was a gathering of people that are ill-informed and inexperienced with regard to politics and current affairs, and thus their contribution to the rally was futile. Consequently, the media framing appears to fit with pre-conceived ideas about young people and their engagement with politics and shows like *TDS,* discussed above. In contrast, my field research of the event and the information gathered during the interview process show a very different result, in that it was actually a largely a mixed gathering with many seniors in attendance too. It would appear, then, that older age groups also identify with hybrid political satire shows like *TDS*. Indeed, this result is a reflection of a small percentage of findings, thus it is not completely representative of all of the rally participants. The result is however insightful because it goes some way to challenging the premise put forward by scholars such as Baym, Feldman and Young and Tisinger; that research on *TDS* audiences should be confined to just young audiences. Instead, this finding opens up a new avenue of investigation: understanding senior audiences' relationship with late night satirical news programming**.**

7.5 Carnival Attire & Signs
In his announcement of the rally, Jon Stewart explained that it would be a place "for some nice people to get together for fun". Stewart's emphasis on fun and the fact that the rally took take place the day before Halloween meant that a large number of

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[22] During an interview with Jon Stewart, Bill O'Reilly referred to *TDS* audiences as stoned slackers (PR Newswire (2014)

participants attended in fancy dress. This was also evident from my field research at the rally and it was also picked up by the news media, as 5.5% of the articles framed the attendees in relation to the costumes they wore. Many of the media descriptions were a celebratory reaction to the annual holiday taking place the next day. For example, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* commented on people dressed as wizards, bananas and giant bees (Schneider 2010). Characterising the attendees in this way might suggest an absence of any political motivation on the part of the attendees. However some appeared to use their costumes to make a political statement. The *International Herald Tribune* wrote that some political protesters came in costume. One man wore a diaper and sombrero while carrying a wooden anchor (Tavernise and Stelter 2010). His costume was a depiction of an "anchor baby", a name that conservative talk show hosts use to refer to children born in the United States to immigrant parents (Ibid). Similarly, the *Richmond Times Dispatch,* made reference to one rally participant who carried fake bear arms at the rally in order to make a satirical statement about arguments surrounding the right to bear arms (Calos 2010).

This result indicates that parts of the news media framed the rally participants in relation to how they were dressed and how this related to ideas around politics and fun. Yet the media spent little time covering the many signs brought by the participants despite the fact that they were used in a similar fashion to their costumes. This is because they also channelled humour and sometimes social and political statements. The research considers the use of signs a valid area of investigation along with the participants' attire because these aspects inform this study about the people that attended the event. Also, from my field research at the rally, I found that the participants' signs were a major part of the event as they were carried by a large majority of the people that were present. This is likely to have been a result of Jon Stewart's (2010a) request leading up to the rally, whereby he encouraged people to bring signs and think of ideas to put on them, including, "9/11 was an outside job" and "Legalise Pot". The rally's organisers were obviously keen to make this a major feature of the event too as there are countless pages on the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' website dedicated to people's photographs of the signs that were carried(see figure 1 below).

Figure 1.

Official Rally to Restore Sanity Web Page

The news media did make reference to some of the signs and banners that the participants brought, all of which utilised humour to make their point. Some were simply funny with no reference made to the rally's civility message or to any other political or social issues. *The New York Times* featured one sign that read, "Tights are not Pants" (Tavernise & Stelter 2010). According *to The Lewiston Morning Tribune*, some people carried signs, protesting against the existence of protest signs (Yen & Woodward 2010). As discussed in the last chapter, this may have been used to highlight and mock the culture of over-the-top political rallies that had taken place earlier that year, prior to the mid-term election. Actual political protest signs were few and far between. From my fieldwork I only witnessed a select few which referred to issues including the legalisation of marijuana and the reform of the country's tax policy, but this was not a theme that was picked up in the news coverage at all. In most cases the rally signs simply highlighted the civility message channelled by Jon Stewart. Some used humour in their banners to communicate this message as well as mocking the stereotypical arguments associated with political moderates and their reasonableness. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* highlighted one sign saying "What do we want? Moderation! When do we want it? Within a reasonable time frame if that works?" (Timpane 2010). Other signs that I saw, like the ones below, promoted the

idea that Americans, regardless of their political outlook, should attempt to be more civil to one another so that they can work together and get things done.

Figure 2.   **Figure 3.**

In quite a few cases, the attendees used their signs to mock and attack groups and institutions that they felt were responsible for the extremism and insanity in the country's political discourse. *Fox News* was one of the targets. For example, *The Spokesman Review* referenced one sign that stated, "The only thing to fear is Fox" (Bannach 2010) which suggested that the news outlet was solely responsible for instigating fear and extreme political rhetoric. This was a trend that was evident in my field research. For example, Figure 4 shows an attendee who considers *Fox News* to be a comedy channel whereas *Comedy Central* is the place this person goes to get their news.

Figure 4.

What can be gathered from the media's coverage of the signs is that they predominantly focused on those that were funny and slightly mocking of the moderate

political standpoint and those that attacked the potential rally targets, a way perhaps of slightly undermining how these people engaged with the event. My field research photographs, however, show that many of the signs were in fact advocating a more deliberative and responsive relationship between the Republicans and the Democrats and one that viewed *TDS* as a trusted news source. Of course these results are limited in that the media spent little time covering this aspect of the rally and my own research was limited to a few areas of the rally site. Nevertheless, the results are telling in that they again confirm the ambiguity of the event and the different ways in which it was interpreted by the attendees and the media alike.

So far, the findings show how costumes and signs were used by the attendees, in some instances for fun; yet they were also used by others as an innovative way to draw attention to political or social issues. This could be considered a form of spectacle which is increasingly used in contemporary protests and demonstrations as a way for participants to gain media exposure (Gitlin 1980: 215, Deluca & Peeples 2002: 145). Spectacle through protest is an approach that borrows from the fields of street theatre and, more recently, ironic activism as described by Amber Day (2010) in her book *Satire & Dissent*. The combination of these fields also draws comparisons with Bakhtin's writing on the Carnival, a 13th century event that utilised festive energy and humour to celebrate the temporary liberation of the established order and mark the suspension of all hierarchical ranks (Bakhtin 1968: 10). Indeed, Bakhtin's description of Carnival has many links to the contemporary practices of carnival protest, but its use of spectacle, humour and celebration are not just used to garner media attention. This practice also serves as an alternative channel of activism that attempts to be a more creative and fun form of political participation. Ben Shephard (2003), a carnivalesque activist for the Anti-Globalisation movement, argues that this approach can help move spectators to join the fun and to become part of the concrete action of social change.

Some contemporary rallies and protest events that embrace elements of Carnival are also similar to Bakhtin's analysis of the Carnival due to their absence of hierarchy. According to Shephard, (2003) carnivalesque rallies and protests treat all participants as equals because each person is free to be a leader, not somebody's designated speaker. This trend was evident in the Occupy Wall Street movement as many news

media critiques (Rapoza 2011, Gautney 2011, Linksy 2011) of the group highlight how it was driven by a non-hierarchical consensus and an absence of authority. Similarly, the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' also followed a similar logic, in that no-one, not even Jon Stewart[23], claimed to lead the vast crowd that participated in the event. Contemporary social movements appear to adopt this approach because it gives participants the freedom to voice their individual concerns. This might make them more appealing to citizens because their involvement will not be limited to one over-arching political message or a demand that they might not necessarily agree with.

Using Occupy Wall Street again as an example, this movement was also led by a series of different agendas, which included: the lack of healthcare for the uninsured, anti-capitalism, and the increase in university tuition fees. Although the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' embraced the idea of civil political discourse, the evidence relating to their attire, the signs they brought and their reasons for attending the rally show that there was not one overriding reason for identifying with the event. The next chapter will discuss how social movements with multiple agendas but which lack in leadership can actually undermine their intentions. That is why the use of Carnival and its many offshoots, such as spectacle, humour and irony, were used by the rally participants to draw attention to the reasons why they identified with the rally. Indeed, references to their attire and the signs that the participants used may not have been the most frequently used descriptions of them but they were still a prominent part of the media coverage and my field research which illustrates their success in garnering attention to their thoughts and protest issues.

Some of the rally participants were more successful than others in garnering media attention. For example, the media focused in particular on those dressed up as characters from Alice in Wonderland. Schwartzel, (2010) of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* wrote, "Halloween costumes made sneak appearances, with the cast of Alice in Wonderland materialising several times. Each had signs relating to "Tea Party". The *National Post* provided a more in-depth description adding, "One trio at the rally dressed up in an Alice in Wonderland motif, and had a placard that read "I stopped

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[23] In a post-rally interview Jon Stewart argued that he did not consider himself a leader of the rally; instead it was a rally for a large proportion of the country who are un-represented by the media (Maddow 2010b)

having tea parties when I was 7" (Kay 2010) .   The picture below also shows a similar fancy dress example, with Alice holding a sign stating, "We're all mad here!" (OP 2010).

Figure 5.

This style of 'dress up' was a reference to the American Tea Party, a political movement often criticised by liberals because of its support for reducing government spending despite being highly subsidised by a small group of conservative billionaires (Krugman 2009). The movement is well known for its outspoken supporters like *Fox News* and Sarah Palin. It is also recognised for its aggressive viewpoints that include comparisons between President Obama and the Nazi Party (Moon 2013). Poking fun at the Tea Party and its supporters was not just reserved for those in costume; many of the participants also used signs and banners to make similar points.

Figure 6 shows one sign featuring the term "Don't be a Tea Bag". Tea Bag is a sexual derogatory term that many on the left[24] have used to ridicule members of the right-wing movement. Figure 7 shows a sign aimed at the Republicans or Tea Party, which suggests that they are an insular group that is only interested in taking the country back. This statement has many connotations; a reference perhaps to them wanting to return to power. The second part of the statement "we want to take our country forward" however, suggests that the people wanting to take the country

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[24] Left-wing MSNBC host Rachel Maddow regularly used the term tea-baggers when referring to the Tea Party and some members of the Republican Party (Linkins 2009). This is a phrase that refers to a man lowering his genitals into a person's mouth during sex.

forward (people at the rally) are more progressive and forward thinking than close-minded conservatives.

Figure 6.

Figure 7.

Similar examples were also used in the news media. *The Washington Times* highlighted one sign that said, "Sarah Palin 2012 – well the world's supposed to end anyway" (Harper 2010). This statement suggests that Palin would only be a worthy candidate for the Presidency because her time in office would be cut short due to the Mayan prophecy predicting the end of the world.

Considering the political outlook of those that attended, it is understandable that the media chose to focus on the above examples. This is because they reinforce the political divide between the left-wing rally participants and the conservative led Tea Party movement at a time of heightened political interest: the mid-term election. Denigrating the Tea Party or any other political movement, however, might not have been the type of rally participation that Stewart had hoped for. The purpose of the

rally was to instigate a more measured and deliberative approach to political discourse rather than negative attacks against other political viewpoints. Some of the participants might have been guilty of contradicting the very message that the rally was attempting to uphold. This result, coupled with the media's decision to rely on the fancy dress label when describing the rally participants, is yet another example of the ambiguity surrounding the event. By attending in costume, the rallygoers were able to express their involvement through fun or by other politically related means. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, these other 'means' might be what Tilly (1995) and Coleman and Blumler (2009) recognise as 'thin' demonstrations of citizenship. This is because some of the participants were, at times, highlighting a political cause, without being deliberative and proposing solutions.   Alternatively, others appear to have used extravagant costumes as a way of attacking or making fun of groups whose political outlooks differed from their own.

The inclusion of carnivalesque costumes and signs show how the attendees were able to garner attention from the media and highlight a wealth of ideas and issues or just their sense of humour. While this might have produced a powerful image of the event conveying the participants' identities and engagement with the rally (Juris 2008: 64), the use of carnival might also have undermined the participants' efforts. As discussed earlier, the different messages that the participants communicated through their signs and attire might have created confusion in how the media reported the event. Wahl-Jorgensen (2003: 140) discovered a similar trait in her study of the media coverage of the 2001 May Day protest. Here, the protesters were portrayed by the media as "a silly disjointed bunch bereft of real ideas and incapable of staging a political event, despite their best efforts" (Ibid). This example is applicable to the overall media framing of the rally, which demonstrated multiple interpretations of what the event was, rather than a clear call for action. In addition, the concentration on silly costumes, signs and the participants' attacks on right-leaning groups also led to ambiguous and confused media coverage that failed to publicise what the participants really hoped to achieve.

Another limitation of humour through carnival is that the participants' messages might have been delegitimised because the media failed to take them seriously. Chapter 4 highlighted how Freud (1960: 149) favoured humour as a method of

communication because it makes aggressiveness or criticism against people in exalted positions easier to digest. In other words, criticism through humour might be more acceptable than criticism alone because it elicits laughter. But according to Chvasta, (2006: 6) humour can have a detrimental impact on how the media portray social movements because it is not considered as effective as angry protest. Shephard (2003) agrees, and adds that humour and irony recede in relevance when political situations become too dire or when there is an urgent need to engage in dialogue with the political mainstream. The aims of the rally might not have been considered urgent; however political polarisation was certainly heightened after the inauguration of President Obama and in the lead up to the mid-term election. Nevertheless, the media coverage dedicated to signs and costumes rarely reflected the event's non-partisan message or any other valid political message. Instead, the coverage focused on those that evoked humour or attacked the political opposition. According to Juris (2008: 84) and Routledge (1998: 255), this style of coverage is to be expected when rally/protest participants stage spectacular events as journalists focus on intrigue, irrationality and the appearances of those involved, rather than the underlying political or social issue.

Focusing on the irrationality and appearance of some rally participants might have been a valid reporting approach in light of the attacks and ridicule that some participants aimed at right-leaning groups. While the use of spectacle can be a positive way for social movement groups to obtain publicity, it can also be damaging to the aims and intentions of these groups. According to Wahl-Jorgensen (2003: 140) in her study of the globalisation movement, a common theme in the media coverage was the hypocritical nature of the protestors who were the middle-class beneficiaries of capitalism.   A similar theme is applicable to the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' as the media were highlighting how a predominantly left-leaning group, attending a rally calling for rationality in politics, were actually attacking political groups with different outlooks to their own.

7.6 The Absence of 'Politically Engaged' Frames

The previous section highlighted some instances of 'active citizenship' during the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'.   However, because this was an event that could be considered 'political' it is also necessary to account for other examples where the

attendees were framed as political participants. This rarely happened, as the results seen earlier in Table 7.2.1 showed that the participants were framed as activists in only 3.8% of the news sample. A further 2.9% were also described by journalists as 'politically engaged' individuals. In addition to these findings, the news analysis also accounted for instances where single-issue political advocacy groups were mentioned because, from my fieldwork and experience of the day, these also had a strong presence at the rally. Table 7.6.1 accounted for these instances but it can be see, that 85% of the articles failed to mention them at all.

Table 7.6.1 – Framing of Single Issue Political Groups

Groups Present	Percentage of Articles where mentioned
Groups not mentioned	85.7%
Voting advocacy groups	5.3%
Pro-Choice (Naral)	2.2%
Political Action Committees	1.4%
Environmental	1.3%
Legalisation of cannabis	1.3%
Anti-war groups	1%
Educational advocacy groups	0.8%
Anti-Tea Party groups	0.6%
Gay Rights	0.5%
Pro-Immigration groups	0.3%
Animal rights groups	0.3%
Total	100%

The most prevalent advocacy group at the rally were those encouraging people to vote during the mid-term election. *NPR Radio* (2010) for example added, "Liberal groups are latching on to the event. The Democratic National Committee will be there seeking to sign up volunteers and voters in a last minute drive before the election next Tuesday". Similarly *The Lewiston Morning Tribune* (Lightman 2010) commented on how Organising for America, a grass-roots effort that helped elect Obama, was sponsoring a "Phone-Bank to Restore Sanity" at the rally to encourage people to vote. This result may be a reflection of the findings in the previous chapter where it was seen that the dominant framing of the rally was that it was an event that encouraged voting and political engagement amongst liberals. Again, because of the rally's proximity to the mid-term election, framing the rally in this way may have been a natural decision for journalists who may have found it hard to define this ambiguous event.

The lack of attention given to politically active citizens can be accounted for in a number of ways. First, it may have been an accurate media portrayal of those in attendance. Indeed, this was an event hosted by comedians, and despite its civility message Jon Stewart stressed that in no way was it a political event. This, and the fact that the rally had no clear call for action, certainly justifies the lack of attention paid to active citizens at the event. The second argument relates to what some scholars may call standardised representations of ordinary people in contemporary news. Lewis et al (2005) identified these normative representations of citizens in news as passive, reactive and self- interested people that follow the lead of political elites. This style of reporting is not exclusive to the representation of ordinary citizens. Murdock (1981: 210) and Gitlin (1980:27) discovered, in their classic studies of protest reporting, that citizens involved in social movements often have their political messages omitted from news coverage and that their image and message are often trivialised. Here, a trend can be seen in the media's representation of active citizens where they are either absent or unrepresented or where their intentions are deemed insignificant. The news media's representation of citizen participation at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity,' then, might draw parallels with these other scholarly findings too. However, the interviews with some of the rally participants presented a different perspective on the practices of citizenship that appeared to challenge the stereotypical media representation of ordinary citizens.

7.7 Part 2 – Rally Participants & Citizenship Practices
In contrast to the media representations of the rally attendees, the interview process provided a more detailed picture of their citizenship practices. Of the 30 people that were interviewed, 20 discussed and demonstrated practices of 'thin' aspects of political participation and a further 9 respondents identified with both 'thick' and 'thin' aspects. Only one respondent did not consider that they were 'politically active' because they thought that they were too young, but this was certainly something that they would like to be involved in when they are older.

All 29 participants identified themselves with 'thin' aspects of citizenship, which, according to Tilly (1995), entail bare minimum transactions of engagement. Each person stated that they always voted during the election period because they saw it as a civic duty. The 20 that only practised thin aspects of citizenship also made

reference to other demonstrations of participation, which included donating to political candidates and signing petitions.

> I tend to sign a lot of petitions…recently I signed one on gun control, you know that school shooting in Connecticut. I've signed so many petitions about that. Obama sends lots of emails still, you know, asking what's important to you and so I fill out a lot of surveys for the Obama administration. Yeah I sign a lot of petitions (Interview with Heather Chatham 8 March 2013).

Heather argued that she frequently received and signed petitions and surveys. This is a prevalent trend in contemporary democracy as social movements regularly use the Internet as a way of interacting with the public on a local and global scale (Rohlinger et al 2012: 1). The Internet has become an effective channel of communication for these groups, providing them with a public platform that can help legitimise their aims and help them gain public support. As a channel for political engagement and activism the Internet is not without its problems, as it has been suggested that this method creates a nonchalant approach to political participation. Morozov (2009) has referred to this process as 'slacktivism', which refers to methods of political participation that have no impact on real-life political outcomes, but only serve to increase the feel-good factor of the participant. Putnam (1995) made a similar argument about weaker forms of activism like petition signing, adding that they derail political participants away from more effective forms of participation. One of the interviewees also made a similar point about petition signing:

> I'm not as good at political activism as I probably should be. I mean I get a lot of stuff from liberal organisations where they send me these petitions and all you have to do is click the bottom and you've signed the petition. I think they call it slacktivism, I've wondered about that, but I still do it because I kind of feel like well at least I'm doing something. I tend to only sign if they're well worded and if they provide feedback (Interview with Jeff Brody 17 February 2013).

Jeff's response suggests his apprehension regarding signing up to online petitions because of the sense of detachment. Yet if a more involved approached is taken, for example researching the organisation that you are supporting, showing interest in the cause and following up on its progress, this can be an effective and positive representation of political participation. Thin forms of citizenship like petition signing, then, should not be written off entirely as weak participation as there are

many positive elements associated with them too. Christensen (2011) for example, found that online activism can help invigorate other methods of civic participation as opposed to just 'click and send'. Lee and Hiseh (2013) also made a similar argument in their study where they found causality between respondents signing up to online petitions and them contributing to other political and social causes. Of course there are still issues surrounding this method in that people can easily just 'click' and forget about the petitions they have signed.

Thicker forms of citizenship relate to deliberative methods of political communication between citizens, which are discussed honestly and openly (Coleman and Blumler 2009: 4). These include instances where citizens attempt to make proposals and suggestions about ways to solve political and social problems (Lewis et al 2005: 42). While only a small proportion of the sample identified with thick aspects of citizenship, the respondents within this group were able to demonstrate methods of political deliberation and solution finding through different means.

Some interviewees referred to instances where they had attempted to create solutions to political and social problems by writing to their local congressman or newspaper editors. While some had faith in approaching these institutions directly, others appeared jaded about it and remarked that it had become a pointless task. Sarah Abdelaziz[25] added, "I've come to the recognition that I can lobby my congressman or woman as much as I want but I don't think that will really change anything". Matt Scoggin made a similar argument after his past experience of writing to his congressman:

> I do write letters to my local politician when I get annoyed about stuff but it doesn't make much difference. Like CISPA, basically my point of view is that internet controls are too broad but all I got back was "oh well we are protecting America" or protect your gun rights and joint the NRA…you have to remember I have all Republican representatives so that's just part and parcel of being a Texas Democrat, so I've never got a letter back that I've liked (Interview 3 April 2013).

Sarah and Matt's responses are not uncommon. Consider for example Nina Eliasoph's study on American people and their citizenship habits. Eliasoph (1998: 232) found that people avoided airing their political thoughts through public platforms

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[25] (Sarah Abdelaziz interview 14 February 2013)

like those described by Sarah and Matt because they assumed that powerful institutions would not pay attention to common citizens and their public spirited talk. While this study cannot account for the way that political offices and congressmen/women respond to public opinion, Eliasoph makes a valid point, particularly with regard to how the news media respond to the opinions of ordinary people. Wahl-Jorgensen's (2002) work on how journalists discuss people who write letters to editors suggests that the culture of the news room creates a discourse of disdain towards the public (cited in Lewis et al 2005: 27). While this problem may be due to the way in which elite institutions respond to ordinary Americans, the issues raised by Sarah and Matt could also be a result of their engagement with satirical news programmes like *TDS*. Indeed, in their study of political comedy audiences, Baumgartner and Morris (2006: 341) found that many viewers exhibited more cynicism towards the electoral system which may lead to non-participation. This is perhaps a result of how these shows focus on politics through pre-existing negative stereotypes (Ibid).

Even though some of the interview respondents felt that contacting politicians or the media to voice their opinions was, at times, a pointless task, this did not prevent them from being politically active in other ways. While Sarah Abdelaziz dismissed citizen/political interaction she did advocate citizen/citizen methods of civic participation:

> I'm involved in a community organising group called Take back the Block…it mostly involved knocking on doors and canvassing. I'm doing it in an area which is undergoing rapid gentrification so we're hoping to mobilise people around that and some of the racial questions that I think have been left unanswered…there is such a defined racial divide between black Americans and white Americans and between Latino's and whites…so we're trying to reach out to people that I think are mostly left out of mainstream politics, people that don't seem to have a voice. We ask questions about their neighbourhood, what they like about it and what they don't like and together we try to come up with collective solutions (Interview 14 February 2013).

Sarah saw the grass-roots approach as a more effective way of creating political change. Rather than attempting to create solutions through channels of government Sarah suggests that it is more beneficial to practise citizenship at a local level. In addition, by focusing her attention on groups that she argues are unrepresented in

mainstream politics, The Take Back the Block community organising group were creating a public platform that was accessible to all regardless of gender, race or culture. Sarah's examples draw parallels with Habermas's conception of the public sphere, in which face-to-face exchanges regarding issues of common concern take place in local salons and coffee houses (Dahlgren 1995: 7). Yet, unlike the bourgeois public sphere that excludes specific social groups (Fraser 2008: 60 & 64), Sarah illustrates how her example of local political participation is accessible to all. This is one of the benefits of local grass-roots organisations; the participants are more inclined to get involved because there is a better chance of influencing change at a local rather than a national level (Young Foundation 2010).

Only a small proportion of the respondents who identified with 'thick' methods of citizenship used political talk on a regular basis because they found it a useful way of discussing and understanding political issues. Karen Brody, who created the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' Facebook page, originally intended for it to be an information page for the event, but it developed into a platform for exchanging ideas and creating discussions:

> There was a momentum after the rally that I wanted to maximise
> so that people that were initially engaged in the rally could
> continue, hence the post-rally page was set up so people can stay
> informed and participate in whatever way they can. Usually I
> post stories to initiate discussions just to make sure that people
> are listening and paying attention (Interview with Karen Brody 3
> February 2013).

Karen's example illustrates a highly involved form of political engagement in that she is responsible for creating an alternative public sphere where citizens can participate by discussing political and social issues. But, when I asked Karen about the debates and discussions that take place on her page, she said that for the most part, members tend to agree on the same points, which are predominantly related to the ridiculousness of the current political climate. With a largely liberal membership on her Facebook group page, it is understandable that members might draw similar conclusions regarding the issues they discuss. Yet when arguing the merits of deliberative democracy, Dahlgren (2009: 88) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007: 20, 25) assert that it is essential that participants have access to alternative opinions that may challenge and change their own.   This process of deliberation was evident in some of the interview responses. For example, Gerry Chatham, a liberal from New Jersey,

described how political discussions with his conservative work colleagues could actually be a productive and informative experience:

> There are a couple of people I work with who are Republicans and conservatives that I engage in a lot of conversation with. I'll send them articles and they will send me some from the *Wall St Journal* and we'll get into a discussion…it's not nasty or anything, its very constructive back and forth and we all really seem to enjoy it…there are times when we disagree but I find that as long as the other person is reasonable and knowledgeable about the issues then we very often find common ground. Also, I always come away saying wow I need to learn more and think about that more. I don't think it affects me in terms of making me think certain things, but it certainly makes me more inquisitive (Interview with Gerry Chatham 10 February 2013).

Gerry's response illustrates how discussions with people with different political outlooks can actually be an enriching and educational experience. This is a result that draws parallels with Diana Mutz's (2006: 2) research in which she praises the public service aspect of the American workplace and how it establishes a social context where diverse groups are forced into daily interactions with one another. Many of the interview responses however, show that Gerry's experience was an exception to the rule. Virtually all of the respondents, at some point in their lives, had entered into political discussions with friends, family and work colleagues, but the experience had prevented them from doing so again. This is because the discussions often became heated or aggressive, or they were completely redundant because people were unwilling to change their point of view. Toni Carrico[26] fell into the latter category. She stated that, "I have a lot of friends who are not at all in agreement with me politically so we just don't talk about it because there is nothing I can do to change the way they think". Bill Fotheringham made a similar point when he discussed talking politics with others:

> It's polarised, I have family members that I can't even discuss it [politics] with. My wife is a lot easier, she'll sit there and wont say anything but I do say something, but no matter what I say to them it's not gonna make a god damn bit of difference. And no matter what they say it's not gonna make a god damn difference to me so it's a waste of time for us all to sit there and talk about it. I mean I love my family…but when we start talking politically it turns ugly very quickly (Interview 23 February 2013).

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[26] (Interview 13 February 2013)

Both Toni and Bill's examples illustrate the difficulties in practising thick forms of citizenship like political deliberation in contemporary society. This supports Mutz's (2006: 10) research, which shows that political talk might be advocated by theorists as a beacon of democracy but in reality it is much less popular in practice. Toni and Bill's responses support this premise as they cite stubbornness and aggressiveness as reasons for avoiding political discussions. Their reasoning, however, might actually be a way of abandoning their responsibility to make political discussions work with people with a different mindset. Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) found a similar trait in her research on the democratic role of newspaper staff and their thoughts on some of the letters they received from readers. Staff used the idiom of insanity as a way of poking fun at letter writers and distancing themselves from them (2007: 137). Consequently, this enabled the journalists to discredit the opinions and interests of the readership because they were viewed as crazy and irrational (Wahl-Jorgensen 2007: 151). This is very similar to how Toni and Bill summarised their experiences of talking politics, but the idiom of 'insanity' in this context might be used to describe people whose political opinions differ from their own.

The above examples show how dismissive and unreasonable citizens become when faced with the prospect of talking politics. There are many reasons that may account for this, one of which is a lack of political knowledge. Gamson (1992: 5), in his book *Talking Politics,* found that most people lack political knowledge, which can prevent informative discussions from taking place. Gamson's argument appears to support that of Gerry Chatham above, as he mentioned that it is easier to find common ground with people when they are aware of all the facts. Another reason could relate to the potential effects of engaging with satirical news shows like *TDS,* which Baumgartner and Morris (2006: 341) state can result in viewers exhibiting higher levels of cynicism towards politics. This may explain why citizens are sceptical about entering into political deliberation as they feel that a mutual understanding is unachievable. Eliasoph (1998: 154) identifies this as a 'cynical chic' disposition whereby citizens are willing to engage in political debate but convince themselves that they cannot change political issues. Indeed, this attitude was certainly evident in the discussions I had with Toni and Bill as past experience had taught them that entering into such discussions was a pointless task. Thus, the results obtained in this chapter illustrate the relevance of Eliasoph's scholarly contribution to the field of contemporary

citizenship because, in both studies, the citizens take the position of making a "strong effort to convince oneself and one's friends [or in this case family] of citizens powerlessness" (Eliasoph 1998: 154).

The problem with adopting this cynical disposition is that it "closes off avenues for involvement that go beyond expressions of vehement disengagement" (Eliasoph 1998: 154). Eliasoph (1998: 158, 160) adds that this form of cynicism makes an earnest commitment impossible and instead its practitioners tend to laugh at society rather than trying to change it. This is an argument that was also raised by Baumgartner and Morris (2006). They argue that engagement with political satire can lead to feelings of apathy and cynicism towards politics. Various scholars have stated that satire has limited abilities as a communication platform (Griffin 1994, Freud 1960). Kernan (1965) and Jon Stewart, commented that the genre can only highlight and make fun of social ills but it cannot do anything to change them. Rally participants Toni and Bill appear to have adopted a very similar approach; recognising the problems associated with bipartisan deliberation, but doing nothing to address or change them.

Satire and cynicism might not be the only contributing factors that account for people's hostility towards political deliberation. It might also be due to audience engagement with partisan news platforms. Jamieson and Capella (2008: 241) highlighted the consequences of partisan news, stating that it polarises audiences' opinions about opposing political parties. Thus, if citizens enter into a discussion with people of a different political persuasion to their own, this can have serious repercussions for the quality of discussion that takes place. For instance, it could result in a situation where citizens are no longer open to oppositional points of view; thus deliberative compromise could eventually become a lost art form (Jamieson & Capella 2008: 243). Again this was a prediction that rang true for a number of the interviewees when attempting to converse with others of different political persuasions.

Returning to the premise of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and its core message of civility in political discourse, the above examples and findings illustrate the contradictions between people's support for the event and how they engage with

politics on a day-to-day basis. As discussed in the next section of this chapter, the vast majority of people, including Toni and Bill, attended the rally because they supported its core message. Despite this, both they and many others that were interviewed showed an unwillingness to enter into political deliberation with people with a different political outlook to their own. Many of their ideas were completely valid, particularly those relating to discussions with friends and family who they did not want to upset or alienate. Mutz (2006: 138) argues that this type of defence is a testimony to how much social relationships are respected over political ones as citizens are encouraged to value community and getting along with their neighbours.

The results, to a certain extent, demonstrate the naivety of an event like the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and its aim to help solve political issues through civil political discourse. In Stewart's interview with Rachel Maddow (2010b), he stated that "we've bought into the idea that the conflict in this country is between left and right and all the news networks have bought into that". He added that:

> Both sides [political parties] have their way of shutting down
> debate, and the news networks have allowed these two sides to
> become the fight in the country, but I think the fight in this
> country is corruption vs non-corruption (Maddow 2010b).

According to Stewart, the media and political systems are responsible for this polarisation, which has prevented other more serious issues from being discussed in the public sphere. Stewart's (2010a) thoughts on American citizens though are very different, as he believes that between 70-80% of the population are reasonable people who might not agree on things but they still manage to "get things done". Stewart is not clear about what he means by "getting things done" but it is likely to be a reference to how citizens can work together to counter political problems on a micro-level. While the interview results only represent a small sample and are not representative of the country as a whole, they do challenge Stewart's perception of regular citizens. As highlighted thus far, citizens are unwilling to enter into political discussion for fear of offending people or because they consider it a pointless task. Stewart, then, appears to have the same utopian ideas about political deliberation as other democratic theorists who value interaction and exposure to conflicting political opinions. However, hoping to achieve those ideas through the rally was unrealistic in

a climate where politicians as well as citizens still refuse to engage in deliberative conversations.

7.8 Summary of Parts 1 & 2

Thus far this chapter has developed a detailed insight into the people that attended the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. The initial media sample results showed that they were a largely-left leaning group of young people that used creative methods such as fancy dress and signs to illustrate their engagement with the event. This ranged from simply identifying with the event for fun, supporting the rally's message, drawing attention to other political issues, to mocking other political groups. On closer inspection however, the three dominant frames might have been used by the media as a way of delegitimising the rally participants. While a large number of left-leaning citizens were in attendance, the media used this frame as a way of associating them with the impending election, which diverted attention away from the rally's core message. Framing the participants as predominantly 'young' people and the connotations associated with this also demonstrates how the media attempted to undermine the people in attendance. This argument is even more convincing considering that the media's framing was inaccurate because the age demographic of the crowd was mixed with a large number of middle aged people in attendance too. The participants' use of carnivalesque traits was also problematic and confusing because of the many ideas on display that meant that observers and audiences might have failed to take them seriously. Their use of carnivalesque traits might also be viewed as hypocritical, particularly as some of the crowd members were mocking and attacking political groups at an event that called for civility in politics.

Part 1 has presented a number of accurate interpretations of the rallygoers in relation to their age, political outlook and how they chose to engage with the event via carnivalesque methods. Nevertheless, the media, and sometimes the practices of the participants themselves, diverted attention away from the rally's core message and raised questions about their reasons for engaging with the event. Consequently, this presents an image of the rally attendees as an ineffective and incompetent social movement group that lacked a coherent message and strategy.

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Similarly to scholarly research that has examined social movement practices and the representation of citizens in the news, this study also found that little reference was made to politically active citizens at the rally. In contrast, the interview process illustrated that virtually all of the participants were politically active people. This supports the research of Goldwaite-Young and Esralew (2011: 112), which found that *TDS* audiences are more engaged (politically) and participatory than people who do not watch these types of shows. While a small proportion of the respondents took part in 'thick' demonstrations of citizenship, the vast majority only practised 'thin' aspects of political participation like voting and petition signing. This is a reflection perhaps of the contemporary world in which people's commitments and busy lives prevent them from partaking in deeper forms of political participation (Putnam 1995: 76). Interestingly, despite the premise of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', an event that criticised how polarised politics was destroying political communication in the United States, many of the interviewees refused to enter into political conversations. This is because it often instigated an aggressive rhetoric, or they feared potentially alienating friends and family because of a lack of agreement. This finding resonates with the work of Eliasoph (1998) and also with Mutz's (2006) observation regarding political deliberation. This result however, appears to refute the claims made by Goldwaite-Young and Esralew's (2011: 112) who argued that *TDS* audiences are confident about discussing politics with friends, family, co-workers and people online. Goldwaite-Young and Esralew might be quite right in their findings, but it is unclear whether such discussions take place with people who share their political outlook. Like the results found in this study, it may be the case that other *TDS* audiences are unlikely to enter into a political debate with people who do not share their political beliefs and vice versa. Of course it is important to add that in this study interviews were only conducted with a small sample of people and are in no way representative of *TDS* audiences as a whole. Nevertheless, this finding adds an additional insight into the media's representation of the rally attendees. A similar approach will also be used in section 3, which will examine the participants' motivations for attending the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'.

7.9 Part 3: Motivations for Attendance
Central to interpreting the rally was examining peoples' motivations for attending. The news analysis results found in Table 7.9.1, illustrate that journalists rarely asked

the rally participants this question. . The reasons why are perhaps driven by a combination of factors, which were discussed in the previous chapter, for example journalistic norms and the commercial imperatives of the contemporary news environment.

Table 7.9.1 Reasons for Attendance at the Rally

Reason	Number of People	Percentage
This question wasn't asked	252 (cases)	60%
Support the rally's message	83	19.8%
To be with like minded people	25	6%
For fun	19	4.5%
Campaign for mid-terms	16	3.8%
Activism	9	2.1%
Frustration with media	6	1.4%
To support Obama	5	1.2%
Fan of the show	4	1%
Intrigue	1	0.2%

7.10 Civility Advocacy

The most frequent attendee response was that they had come to support the rally's non-partisan message of bringing civility and sanity back to political discourse. This response suggests that their reason for attending mirrors Jon Stewart's non-partisan message. Yet, in accordance with the definitions of the rally, described in Chapter 6, their attendance could also be characterised as politically motivated. With this in mind, the news media could have potentially framed the participants' responses as similar to those given by protestors and social movements. According to Entman, (1993: 52), this is known as a diagnostic framework, where the media makes reference to the overarching problem that the movement is publicising, as well as the causes of the problem and a discussion of the specific elements of the problem that have been raised, and then suggested remedies to the problem. By utilising this collective action reporting approach, the media enable the social movement/protest group to unify their message and the central aims of their campaign.

Interestingly, collective action frameworks were virtually absent from all of the media interviews with the rally attendees. In most cases, they just stated their reasons for attending and the issue they were demonstrating about. Bill James, for example, stated that he had come to the rally all the way from San Diego to support moderation and speak out against the hyperbole in our political discussion (Savan 2010 *The Notion Blog*). Another participant featured in a *Canwest News Service* article stated:

> I love the idea of a rally that says, "everybody chill out". I think it is important to show up in support of the fact that there really is a silent and increasingly dismayed majority of people in this country who don't think the way to debate in this country is to compare your opponent to Hitler (Alberts 2010).

Both newspaper interviewees were clear about their reasons for attending: advocating a civil and moderate approach in the exchange of political information. In addition, they highlighted what they considered to be the over-arching problem: the emotion and vitriol embedded in media and political communication. Yet no reference was made to how the rally participants or the collective community attending the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' intended to develop and embed a more civilised national dialogue. On first inspection it is easy to place an element of blame on the news media for failing to dedicate time to gathering information and understanding the concerns of those attending the event. After all, this chapter, and the previous one, have discussed the implications of journalistic norms and how these can weaken and even remove the political messages and intentions of activist groups (Murdock 1981). A similar trait, however, was also evident during the interview process for this study, as 16 of the 30 interviewees also supported the rally's civility message. Yet despite having ample opportunity to voice their beliefs, demands and possible solutions regarding changing the current practices of political communication, none of them indicated how this could be achieved. Mike Janus explained that:

> It [the rally] hit a real point with me. I thought it was time we make a statement in this country about the people who work on the fringes of this silliness going on and it was a good opportunity for us to kind of take part in an event that illustrated that that we weren't in that same party that the extreme left or extreme right, mostly the extreme right and that we weren't buying that. The middle of the road reasonable thinking people are not normally represented so I was excited to be able to take part in something like that. It's very disappointing how polarised it has become. And you know however it started, whether it's Republicans or Democrats, we've evolved to a point where it's very difficult to get anything done (Interview 26 January 2013).

In Mike's response, he addressed the over-arching problem in the United States, the polarisation of the political landscape. This suggests that his attendance at the rally was an indication that he and others do not represent the opinions of those who belong to the extreme fringes. Another interviewee, Bill Fotheringham utilised a similar argument when articulating his reason for attending:

> I felt it had to be shown to the country that there had to be other people
> in this country that don't agree with something like the Beck rally. It's
> all about creating fear, fear about things that are just non-existent. I
> think back to when I was younger and you know we had differences
> between political parties, but we always come together on things but
> now we can't even come together on the budget, it's just ridiculous.
> It's very polarised and you feel it everywhere, your family, work,
> everywhere you go (Interview 23 February 2013).

Like the interview responses found in the newspaper sample, both interviewees were clearly supportive of the rally's civility message and they recognised that some form of change is necessary. This was the limit of their involvement, however, and where any form of collective action stops. Their attendance, while supportive of the rally's civility message, was not a political demonstration of activism and agency, but a demonstration of people in large numbers supporting a non-partisan event representing their concerns. This finding draws similarities to the populist role of political satirists discussed in Chapter 4. Here it was argued that Jon Stewart plays a convincing citizen surrogate role by working on behalf of the public by airing their concerns in the public sphere (Day 2011: 10, Jones 2010: 238). The large turnout of rally participants then might be an indication of how strongly they identified with the rally's message and Stewart's efforts to publicise and hold accountable the media and political world for polarised political discourse.

The participants' attendance at the rally can be identified as a 'thin' demonstration of citizenship because there was a lack of sustained involvement, passion and agency. Gamson, (1992: 7) argues that these elements are central to the success of social movements because participants who embody these forms of agency have the consciousness that makes it possible to alter social or political conditions through collective action (Ibid). Put simply, determination to create political and social changes is far easier to achieve when those advocating the changes are passionate and fully committed to that cause. Part of what enables protestors and demonstrators to embody the practice of agency is a sense of injustice, because this creates righteous anger and puts fire in the belly of those involved (Gamson 1992: 32). What Gamson suggests is that the presence of emotion can actually be an instigator for political action. Mouffe (2005) makes a similar argument, adding that for people to become politically motivated they have to be passionate about a particular political or social issue.

Numerous scholars (Flam & King 2005, Gamson 1992, Eyerman 2005, Goodwin et al 2001) working in the fields of activism and emotion, cite anger and passion as central to the success of social movements because these can help garner media attention and mobilise the masses. This might explain why the media focused on the participants who contradicted the rally's message by attacking and mocking right-wing political groups. For example, according to Flam and King (2005: 24), 'framing-activities' of social movements will always include a strong emotional component. Thus, by utilising this representation of the rally attendees the news media were able to show the issues raised by this group and the direction of their anger. This, however, was the only example of emotion on the part of the rally attendees. For the most part, the event was completely absent of rich emotion and passionate participation. Jon Stewart (2010a) wanted rational middle ground Americans to attend because they were the antithesis of the overly emotional and extremely polarised discourses represented in political news. Stewart's emphasis on rationality again draws parallels with the work of democratic theorists who advocate civil political discussion over passionate debate. Habermas would certainly agree, as he argues that citizens can only reach a consensus in the public sphere through rational discussion (Washbourne 2010: 13).

While Stewart's rally presented a positive message about rational political dialogue, it seemed that the lack of passion and, subsequently, the absence of collective action solutions, highlighted the limitations of the rally and what it could achieve. The absence of 'thick' demonstrations of participation at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was not necessarily linked to the lack of passionate participation, the ambiguous nature of the event, or its failure to present a clear call for action. Instead, it could have been a direct result of how the participants engage with satirical programmes like *TDS* and the potential cynicism that these can breed in audiences (Baumgartner & Morris's 2006: 341). Thus, while the participants were happy to attend the event and show strength in numbers some may have felt that the prospect of instigating any real change in the country's political dialogue would be an impossible task. This is a result that draws similarities to Eliasoph's argument regarding 'cynical chic', discussed in Section 2, in that the rally participants did not want to be "fooled into wasting their time on something that they cannot influence" (1990: 473). The prospect of changing the nation's political dialogue would be a mammoth task that

ordinary citizens alone could not carry out. Instead, many of the rally attendees participated simply to support the idea of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' but they were collectively unprepared to demonstrate how 'sanity' should be restored.

7.11 Identifying with Others

Another popular response regarding motivations for attendance was the idea of being in the vicinity of like-minded people. This result was evident in the media analysis of this study; Kathy Payne for example said that the rally enabled her to identify with people with a similar mindset:

> We're surrounded by people willing to spew negative opinions regardless of whether they're asked. But we're here, we vote, and now we all know each other. If nothing else, that's what we've got: this big network of people who have been talking to each other and want to keep talking to each other (Deggans 2010).

Other rally attendees were motivated by similar factors. Jody Silvio, who rallied on the Mall at the height of the Vietnam War, said, "It's exciting to see people come together as a community. This rally is about getting people together and showing that we don't have to be divided; we can have a civilised discourse" (*Agence France Presse* 2010). This reason for attending also struck a chord with a number of the interviewees. Lisa Brewer[27] added that, "it was nice to know that there were a lot of people who care about the same issues as you and who are reasonable and friendly people. It was very validating". Similarly, Deborah Flatterly added:

> I find it hard to express what an uplifting experience it was to go to the rally and see so many people who were of the same mind set, maybe not politically, but thinking the same thing that we need to come together (Research interview 10 February 2013).

Both the interview responses and media analysis show how the attendees focused on the idea of community and how the rally was able to create a network of people who believed in similar ideologies. This is an interesting response that resonates with the work of Robert Putnam (1995) in his *Bowling Alone* thesis. Putnam (1995: 76) asserts that people today are very much disengaged from political involvement due to a range of contributing factors, which include: a lack of trust in political institutions, changes in the American family, economics and advancements in technology.

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[27] Research interview with Lisa Brewer 8 February 2013.

Consequently, these factors have individualised and privatised citizens, thus disrupting opportunities for social capital formation (Ibid). Jon Stewart's rally attempted to address this issue by establishing an event for people who were unrepresented in the public sphere because of their busy jobs and lives (Stewart 2010). This collection of evidence and scholarly research indicates that the rally was a space where people could identify with others and show their support for the rally's message through the sheer number of people that were present. According to Tilly (1991: 259), the defining features of what constitutes a social movement are a shared allegiance to a set of beliefs and ways of identifying with a collective identity.

Attending the rally to be with like-minded people again raises the idea of emotions and the role they may or may not have played at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. Earlier it was discussed how emotions such as anger can play an integral role in gathering momentum and success for social movements. Anger was something that Jon Stewart wanted to avoid because of the destructive role it has played in political news reporting. Yet the idea of people uniting through shared beliefs is a form of collective identity, which, according to Eyerman (2005: 50) evokes moral empathy and an emotional bond between those people. Demonstrations and rallies are platforms that create the possibility of this bonding, as well as opening up a space between the participants and their targets so that other collective acts can be set in motion (Ibid). Eyerman's discussion on emotion and activism certainly applies to some aspects of the rally, as a number of the participants attended because they identified with the same message. By doing this they were able to show their support through the number of people in attendance. However their involvement did not move beyond this as no other collective acts transpired.

The lack of collective action responses at the rally again highlights the limitations of a rally organised by a political satire artist. Scholars including Baumgartner and Morris (2006), Bennett (2007) and Feldman (2007) have all questioned the democratising capabilities of satire platforms like *TDS*, arguing that they can actually discourage political involvement rather than motivate it. However, Amber Day's more recent work on ironic and satiric activism appears to challenge this premise. She asserts that:

> The growth of satiric/ironic activism movements might help
> increase social capital and therefore political engagement.

> This is because ironic activism attracts attention to a specific
> cause, and actively calls upon the audiences' shared
> assumptions in an attempt to make members of existing
> discursive communities present to one another and, ideally,
> to turn those communities into actively politicized ones…this
> is achieved by turning laughter over a shared joke into anger
> and engagement (Day 2011: 145, 146).

Although Day makes a number of valid arguments about the democratising potential of satire, she does not allude to the types of political engagement it might create. For example, does satiric activism inspire 'thin' or 'thick' demonstrations of political participation? The research field of satire and activism is still relatively new so it might be too soon to argue its merits for political participation. In his discussion on collective identity however, Gamson's (1992: 7) claims the success of the group depends on a collective "we" who will help bring about some form of political change. Again, this illustrates the limitations of a satiric event like 'The Rally to Restore Sanity' because while it might have encouraged the presence of a community who identified with its core message, this was the full extent of the attendees' political involvement.

7.12 Attending for Fun (Non-Political Reasons)

The main premise of this chapter was to understand people's motivations for attending a rally that: (1) took place two days before the mid-term election, (2) was hosted by two popular satire artists, (3) promoted a political issue of bringing civil discourse back to politics, (4) would feature other celebrities and music artists and finally (5) was described by Stewart as a non-political event. It was anticipated, then, that the participants' responses would be varied with regard to their justification for attending. The results gathered thus far illustrate that even though the rally's message could be deemed 'political' a large proportion of the participants attended, not as a form of political participation, but simply to support Stewart's non-partisan message and be in the presence of a like-minded community. Another popular response found in the newspaper analysis and interview process was that many attended the event to have fun or because they were fans of the *TDS*. Rallygoer Frances Ryl indicated that he came purely to have fun and enjoy the event. "It's a blast and all about the fun". This campaign season has been really nasty so people are here to have some fun" (*Xinhua General News Service* 2010). The *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Timpane 2010) also received similar responses when speaking to other rally attendees "to be sure, some

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are going for the fun of it" These included student Max Walker, who stated, "I watch both *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, and I thought I'm going, everyone I know is going. It's a fun, social thing to do: I'm not trying to make a point or anything". Much of *TDS* research is pre-occupied with its critical take on contemporary politics, yet with its presence on *Comedy Central* and the increasing popularity of its hosts it was inevitable that some people would attend the rally purely for fun. This reason is not exclusive to the rally as research shows that certain demographics also watch *TDS* just for fun and entertainment. Burwell and Boler (2008) found when conversing with *TDS* fans online, that members commented on how "un-political" the fan community was. In sum, these findings support Dayan's (2001: 75) argument regarding the fields of politics and popular culture: that the two produce very different types of audience practice (Cited in van Zoonen 2005: 56). Entertainment for example brings audiences consisting of fans into being, whereas politics produces publics composed of citizens (Ibid). For some of the participants, their attendance was not motivated by a wish to make a political statement about the country's political rhetoric. Instead, like those that watch *TDS* purely for escapism and for the comedic aspects of the show, these participants attended the rally for exactly the same reasons.

Another revealing aspect of this result was how many of the interviewees (10 out of 30) attended the rally for fun, even though (in Section 2) they identified themselves with 'thick' aspects of active citizenship. When asked about her reasons for attending Susan Bush[28] said, "Oh that would be for fun! I don't think anyone thought it would be the beginning of a movement or a political statement; it was just a fun day. Just something light-hearted and positive, that was the whole point of it". Similarly Rita McCarthy added:

> Well I didn't view it as a political statement [her attendance at the rally]. As I said I am politically active, I have rallied against the war in Vietnam, and I've gone to Washington to protest against the Iraq war so I know when something is a political statement. The rally wasn't a political statement it was just an event" (Interview 24 January 2013).

Those that were familiar with thick practices of citizenship did not see the rally as a political or non-partisan event at all. Rita's statement draws parallels with one of the

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[28] Interview with Susan Bush "5 February 2013).

major debates surrounding *TDS* and, in this instance the rally, and whether they are effective platforms for political engagement. As discussed in Chapter 4, *TDS* might be a useful platform for people who are unresponsive to more traditional modes of political communication (Temple 2006: 257) but how do avid followers of news and politics engage with it? For Rita Matthews, a self-confessed news and politics junkie and a political activist, she not only viewed the rally as non-political but the programme too. When asking Rita about her reasons for watching *TDS,* she replied, "well it's definitely not for news, it's just commentary and very funny". Rita and some of the other interview respondent's who considered themselves politically informed and engaged, appeared to dismiss *TDS* and the rally as effective news and political engagement platforms. Like Dayan (2001) they viewed the fields of politics and entertainment as separate entities. Consequently, this is why they appeared to have attended the rally for fun, rather than for politically motivated or non-partisan reasons.

7.13 Conclusion

As discussed throughout the last few chapters the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was an ambiguous event with many different ideas and meanings attached to it by Jon Stewart, the media and the American public. While the last chapter aimed to examine how the media framed the overall event, this chapter wanted to explore who the rally participants were and their motivations for attending.

The most popular media conception of the rally participants was that they were liberal-leaning citizens. This was closely followed by other frames that described them as young or that used carnivalesque examples relating to their fancy dress attire. Some of these results mirror the research findings of scholars such as Young and Tisinger (2006: 126), Baym (2010) and Feldman (2007), who argue that the *TDS* audience is predominantly young and left leaning. There were some disparities however in the results obtained from the interviews and the field research relating to the age demographic of the attendees, as they were better described as mixed or middle-aged rather than young.

Descriptions characterising the participants in relation to their age and carnivalesque traits could be viewed by social movement scholars as an attempt by the news media

to undermine the participants' aims and attendance (Murdock 1981, Gitlin 1980). This is because they detracted attention away from the rally's core message, despite this being the main reason for the participants' attendance. Also, the stereotypes associated with young people and the multiple reasons for engaging with the rally via carnivalesque traits present an image of the attendees as an ineffective group that lacked a unified message and strategy.

The rally participants' reasons for attending reflected Jon Stewart's civility message as many came to support this idea and to be with like-minded individuals who felt the same way. Others however were simply motivated to attend because it would be a fun event. What was most telling about this set of results is that despite initial signs that their attendance was political, the results show that their attendance was, at best, a 'thin' form of citizenship. This is because none of the attendees featured in this study utilised or discussed collective action solutions regarding how sanity could be restored. Their attendance then, was not a demonstration of activism but was more closely linked to the role they adopt when watching *TDS* programme: supporting Jon Stewart and his ability to speak on their behalf about the current state of politics and journalism practice.

This chapter has established the type of people the rally attendees were and also their reasons for attending. The result was a deeper insight into the type of people that engage with satirical news shows like *TDS*. Section two of this chapter found that *TDS* audiences are politically active, a result that refutes the idea discussed at the beginning of this chapter that the rally could encourage people to become politically active. In contrast, it does support Goldwaite-Young and Esralew's (2011:112) findings that *TDS* audiences are engaged with high levels of political participation. Their study however does not establish the type of political participation that is practised by *TDS* viewers, unlike this study, which found that it was mainly via 'thin' examples of citizenship like voting and petition signing. This might explain the participants' reluctance, at the rally, to embrace thick demonstrations of civic participation like collective action solutions because this was not something they did in their everyday lives. The 'Rally to Restore Sanity' however could have been the perfect environment to nurture thicker demonstrations of civic participation in the future. Mutz (2006: 3) for example, states that:

> Environments where people share the same political
> outlook can be great for cultivating forms of activism
> because people are surrounded by those that agree with
> them and this reinforces the idea that their political view
> points are the only right and proper way to proceed.

Despite Stewart's intentions for the rally to include people of different political orientations, the results of this study show that the event was in fact dominated by left-leaning citizens and people who wanted to be around those that shared a similar mind set. This is in line with Mutz's description of an environment where people share similar ideologies and thought processes about politics. Despite this, none of the interviewees I spoke with felt motivated to embrace other forms of political participation. Of course, the reaction and behaviour of those who attended the rally for fun were completely justified, given that they viewed the rally as an apolitical event rather than as an activist platform. However for those participants who came to support the rally's civility message, many of the findings here present a rather pessimistic view of their approach to citizenship practices.

A number of the attendees could be described as hypocritical in that some attended the event to support the rally's message; yet they still openly mocked and criticised the political groups that they were opposed to. A major theme evident in much of the research on the attendees was the potential cynicism they felt towards politics and active citizenship. This finding closely resembles Baumgartner and Morris's (2006) study on audience engagement with satirical news programming which found increased levels of cynicism in *TDS* viewers. Indeed other cultural factors, like engagement with partisan news, may account for the participants' responses regarding political participation in general and how it was practiced at the rally. Yet, it seems that their reluctance to enter into thicker forms of participation like political talk and the lack of collective action on display at the rally illustrate signs of a 'cynical chic' (Eliasoph 1998) disposition because of their inability to create political change.

In sum, the framing of the attendees, their reasons for attending and Stewart's request for participation that lacked passion, raises questions about the success of the event and its ability to instigate political change. The following chapter will focus specifically on this idea by examining the media and other sources' interpretations of the effectiveness and impact of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'.

Chapter 8: Rally Reactions & Impact

So far this study has considered how a multifaceted event like the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was framed by the news media, the people that identified with the event and what motivated them to attend. The final areas that this chapter will consider are how the media and the participants' perceived the effectiveness of the event. Consequently, this will aid this study's understanding of how effective satire can be in promoting citizenship and the rally's civility message. It will also demonstrate the effectiveness of a satirical rally and what legacy and impact the event has left on America's popular and political culture. These are important questions considering the variety of ways in which the rally was framed and also the participants' reluctance to engage with or create their own collective action solutions. In addition, as scholarly opinions (Griffin 1994, Kercher 1965, Day 2011, Grey et al 2011) on satire and popular culture are very much divided, it is the intention of this chapter to find out whether platforms that embrace these elements can be effective avenues for future political action.

The first part of this chapter will examine the participants' and other sources' concluding thoughts on the rally. These results will be analysed alongside comedy and popular culture theory to provide a detailed picture of what a satirical platform can achieve. This will include discussions on the limitations of satire and also its ability to create new counter-publics and encourage active citizenship.

The final section will explore the media's interpretations of the rally in the months and years that followed. A second news analysis was carried out to examine how the event continued to be discussed and whether it made any further impact on the fields of politics, journalism and hybrid political satire. By analysing these findings and the responses from the sources that attended and observed the rally, this chapter gathered a number of core findings. First, the rally was largely considered an ineffective platform for political action and engagement, which is why it failed to make any real impact on America's polarised political discourse. The results, however, show that the rally was not completely ineffective as journalists attributed it to increased audience ratings for *Comedy Central* and Stewart's emergence into advocacy journalism.

In the two previous chapters, elements of social movement theory were used to analyse the media's framing of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. This theoretical approach answered a range of questions relating to the lack of coverage given to the event and also the way in which the rally participants were portrayed by the media. It has also showed how discourses around activism and political participation at the rally might have been over emphasised prior to the analysis taking place. This was not because of the apolitical label that Jon Stewart bestowed upon the event but because of the participatory behaviour of the people that attended. Indeed, none of the participants featured in this study utilised or discussed collective action solutions regarding how 'sanity' could be restored. It can be argued with confidence that the results thus far show that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' does not fit into what scholars such as Halloran (1970), Gitlin (1980), Murdock (1980) and Gamson (1992) have identified as conventional frameworks of protest and social movements. Consequently, this final results chapter will not, unlike other social movement studies, attempt to measure the success or failure of the event. Instead it will draw on the discussions of those who attended and reported on the rally to understand how they interpreted this ambiguous event.

To explore concluding thoughts on the rally, this chapter drew from the media analysis results that accounted for responses that appeared optimistic, pessimistic or mixed. These were not measured in the same way in which social movement theory judges the success or failings of particular groups. Scholars such as Meyer (2004: 126) and Gamson (1992: 323) cite various definitions of social movement success that range from the groups' achievements such as mobilisation to broader results that include routine access to power and influencing or changing policy. This study was not concerned with examining such explicit definitions of success or failure because the rally did not fall into conventional frameworks of protest events. Instead, less rigid characterisations were used when assessing people's thoughts on the event. These were broken down into three distinct categories, which are described below.

8.1 Defining Reactions
The study accounted for optimistic reactions to the rally shortly after it had taken place. 'Optimistic' was considered the most applicable definition to use when accounting for people's reactions because most of them were gathered in the few days after the rally took place. Thus, by that stage the rally was unlikely to have made any

discernable impact (if any) on American culture, but the participants could still anticipate its effectiveness and what it might be able to achieve. As a result, this study accounted for reactions that suggested that the rally had successfully promoted its civility message, a difficult feat considering the many different ways in which it was interpreted by various sources. Optimistic reactions were also characterised as those that would help encourage other positive outcomes like bringing like-minded citizens together and thus encouraging further political participation. This would include acts such as voting and instigating or taking part in other participatory groups that supported the rally's message after the event had taken place.

Pessimistic reactions worked in a similar fashion because they were gathered from sources on the day of the rally and on the days that followed. Therefore, the responses that were collected could only account for fairly instant reactions to the event. Pessimistic reactions were those that openly criticised the event. For example, news stories that labelled the rally as an ineffective platform to promote the civility message, criticisms regarding the satirical nature of the rally and that the event was too similar to the *TDS* programme. Put simply, most of these responses accounted for disappointment in the fact that the rally had not been an effective platform for changing America's polarised political discourse.

As discussed throughout the findings chapters, the rally was a complex event to characterise because it incorporated elements of politics, activism and popular culture. Given the multifaceted nature of the event and its contradictory message and intent, it was anticipated that some reactions to the rally would be more complex than just optimistic or pessimistic reactions. Consequently the study attempted to account for reactions that were mixed. This included responses that incorporated both optimistic and pessimistic opinions. For example, the rally successfully promoted its message on the day of the event but thereafter it was completely ineffective. Mixed opinions also accounted for analytical reactions to the rally which were characterised as those that questioned its authenticity and whether a hybrid satire/activism event could change the country's political dialogue.

8.2 Part 1: Source and Participant Interpretations

The responses in Table 8.2.1 show that most sources interpreted the effectiveness of the rally through pessimistic responses. These were closely followed by mixed responses, and then those that summarised the rally in an optimistic manner.

Table 8.2.1 Source Responses to the Effectiveness of the Rally

Source Responses	Percentage of Cases
Pessimistic responses	35.35
Mixed responses	34%
Optimistic responses	30.65%
Total	100%

The results in Table 8.2.2 show that rally attendees and journalists were the most prominent sources and that they were more likely than other sources to respond pessimistically when summarising their thoughts on the rally.

Table 8.2.2 Specific Source Responses to the Effectiveness of the Rally

Sources	Pessimistic Responses	Mixed Responses	Optimistic Responses
Rally Attendees	13.43%	15.98	15.81%
Single Issue Policy Advocates	0.71%	0.68%	0.62%
Journalists	10.61%	12.24%	5.89%
Republican Pundits	3.54%	0%	0.31%
Democrat Pundits	1.77%	1.7%	2.48%
Republican Politicians	0%	0%	0.62%
Democrat Politicians	0%	0.68%	0.31%
Scholars	1.58%	2.03%	0.93%
Writer	1.58%	0%	2.44%
***TDS* Staff**	0.71%	0%	0.31%
Blogger	1.41%	0.68%	0.93
Source Totals	35.35%	34%	30.65%

Interestingly, both the rally attendees and journalists used the same justification when summarising their thoughts on the rally and that was simply because they considered the event ineffective. Examples of the similarities in their reactions will be discussed in the following section.

8.3 Pessimistic Responses: Ineffectiveness of Satire

Many of the attendees interviewed by the news media considered the rally ineffective because it had not employed any particular strategy to aid Stewart's hopes for a more civilised political tone. Adam Schreifels commented that the rally did not really achieve much and that he had felt, "let down that the hosts didn't deliver a specific call to action" (*The Augusta Chronicle* Georgia 2010). In an interview with *Politico*

another participant added that, "not enough was done, I don't think the rally is going to change anyone's minds or behaviour" (Tau et al 2010).

To prevent reliance on the news media analysis, this chapter has also included the opinions of interviewees who were also rally participants. Unlike the news analysis, negative thoughts on the rally were the least frequent response from the interviewees as only 6 of the 30 answered in this way.   Yet those who summarised the event negatively used the same reasoning as those that were interviewed by the news media: that the event was ineffective because it failed to instigate a form of direct action. Elizabeth Lazenby commented that:

> It could have been so much more, it could have started like a revolution or something? Like we could have made something happen but in the end everybody just kind of walked away from it and were like "Ok let's go find something to eat". There was like no uplifting moment like, I don't know, I wanted a lot more from it. I think I had really high expectations (Interview 9 February 2013).

Elizabeth was not the only interviewee who had expected more from the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. Ann Elizabeth Salmon also felt let down by the event because it was a missed opportunity for citizens to become involved in effective measures to help change the political tone in the country:

> We had a wonderful time but I guess I felt a little disappointed that there wasn't, although I understand that they [Stewart and Colbert] don't want to get involved in political statements. But it seemed like that got everybody there, but there wasn't really anything there to get involved in after. There wasn't any other events where we could all get together, the people that were already there were the ones that were willing so there was nothing that moved us past that group of people. There was nothing that was proposed or anything that could focus our energy so that was kind of disappointing. You know after it was over we were like, that was awesome but ok now what? There really was no next step so that was kind of sad (Interview 23 February 2013).

The lack of opportunity for the participants to get involved in pushing the civility message further was not a response that was just played out in the media as a way of undermining the event, it was also a reaction expressed by the interviewees too. Table 8.2.2 shows that journalists made similar comments about the ineffectiveness of the rally but their criticisms were related to its lack of impact on voting and the mid-term election. *The National Post* wrote, "Irony and humour are great for making people laugh, and as an outlet for political dissatisfaction, but they are no match for

earnestness when it comes to getting out the vote" (Kay 2010). A similar reaction was evident on *MSNBC*'s *The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell* (2010):

> O'Donnell: Do you think any politicians are going to look at his speech…and realise that they actually just saw a model performance that could be a winner?
>
> B Stoddard: I don't think so before Tuesday [election day] Lawrence. I mean, why was this held before the election to be an apolitical event? I think Republicans had a good point that if you really are partisan or left-of-centre then you are ready for a blood bath on Tuesday. I mean why were you coming, driving long distances for this [the rally], this weekend? This rally could have been held at any time.

From a journalistic perspective, the rally was considered ineffective because it did not encourage people to vote during the mid-term election. On first inspection this style of framing could be seen as an attempt by the news media to undermine the rally's civility message. However, as discovered throughout the last two chapters, linking the rally to the election was an inevitable association for journalists to make because of the close proximity between the events. Consequently, journalists reduced Stewart's rally to a conventional understanding of institutional politics by focusing on voting and horse-race coverage that is common practice during election periods (Dahlgren & Sparks 1997: 12). Moreover, rather that analysing the effectiveness of the civility message, journalists measured the rally's success based on its ability to influence citizen voting.

From the above reactions it can be concluded that the rally was an ineffective platform for political engagement. This suggests that a proportion of journalists and participants viewed the rally as a political event despite Stewart's insistence that it was 'apolitical'. It is easy to understand why journalists and the participants alike were drawn to this conclusion. After all, the rally was held days before the mid-term election and Jon Stewart's rally invitation was a call to the American people to unite at the Washington Mall to show the media and political world that they supported the idea of civility in politics. The suggestion that the rally was in fact a political event does not stop with those who observed the rally. Parts of the media and academic world have discussed how Jon Stewart and *TDS* have crossed the boundaries between comedy, journalism and political and cultural authority. Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2009: 419) argues that the show is a post-modern product that defies conventional

boundaries and dichotomies. This is precisely why Stewart's modernist rhetoric and political idealism appeals to political scientists and allows them to accommodate Stewart in their interpretive communication (Ibid). *TDS* has also acquired recognition as a credible news source and political platform. For example, all nine Democratic presidential candidates visited *TDS* during the 2004 primary season and the programme was invited to cover both the 2004 Democratic and Republican National Conventions (Feldman 2007: 10). What these examples show is that over time, Jon Stewart has become an increasingly important figure in the fields of politics and journalism.

The above finding together with the participant and journalist responses goes some way to explaining why the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' might be interpreted as a political event. Moreover, it might also explain the disappointment in the participants' reactions to the event. According to Day (2011: 10), "the satirist [Jon Stewart] is the everyman stand in that he displays disgust and amusement on their behalf". Thus, the rally participants may have been left disappointed that Stewart had not used this opportunity to articulate their personal frustration with contemporary politics and deliver a clear call to action.

The news media might have had underlying reasons for criticising the effectiveness of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. According to Feldman (2007: 410), the more seriously *TDS* is taken as a political and cultural authority, the more this problematises for journalists the increasingly blurred distinction between news and entertainment. Carlson and Peifer (2013: 14) add further weight to Feldman's argument, by asserting that Stewart's adoption of practices and norms outside of traditional journalistic values threatens to undermine "journalism's self-legitimising discourses", which are built on values of detachment, neutrality and even handedness. The rally then may have been the perfect opportunity for journalists to impose negative frameworks of the event because they resented the legitimacy bestowed upon *TDS* by scholars and parts of the journalistic community. Carlson and Peifer (2013: 14) touched upon this negativity in their study of news reporting at the rally as journalists suggested that Stewart should limit himself to satire rather than politics.

This study has discussed how Jon Stewart takes issue with questions surrounding the cultural authority of *TDS* and his role as chief anchor. When interviewed by journalists such as Bill Moyers (2011) and Rachel Maddow (2010b), Stewart argued that his show is simply about making jokes. Furthermore, he believes that his satirical role is limited to criticising targets because he does not have the power to help build something more positive. While Stewart may use these justifications as a way of deflecting accountability from his role as *TDS* anchor, he does make a valid point about the limitations of the genre in which he operates. Griffin (1994: 153), for example, argues that because satire is part of the comedy genre, it has no direct role in influencing politics. Freud (1960: 11) made a similar assertion, stating that the satirist translates their anger and resentment into a satirical attack, which excludes them and their audience from the need for direct action. Some citizens and journalists commenting on the rally clearly did not view it in relation to the defined limits of satire. Instead, they appear to have characterised the rally as an event that crossed the boundary from comedy to politics, yet they were left bitterly disappointed when political engagement elements of the rally were absent.

The above arguments present some of the major contentions surrounding *TDS* and Stewart's role as chief anchor. For example, Chapter 6 argued that the ambiguous discourses surrounding the rally and its inclusion of comedy enabled Stewart to air social and political grievances with no real accountability. This has been highlighted in countless interviews with Stewart when he is questioned about his role as social commentator. In these instances Stewart has attempted to avoid any responsibility by asserting that he is merely a comedian and nothing else. While this might be an easy excuse for him to avoid accountability, it is interesting that some participants did not consider that Stewart might approach the rally in the same way. After all, regular viewers or fans of the show must be accustomed to Stewart's interview responses that have been discussed here. Indeed, perhaps not all of the participants were avid followers of Stewart and thus they may have been inclined to take his role as a political/social commentator more seriously. For some of the participants, their disappointment in the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' might actually have been their own fault. If they were aware of the satirical limits of *TDS* and the rally as an extension of that then perhaps the participants should have taken it upon themselves to form groups with collective action strategies, in order to help change the country's

approach to political talk. This is a point that Stewart stressed throughout his speech at the rally, in which he commented that it was up to "ordinary Americans to work together to get things done" (Brown 2010). Yet, as discussed in the last chapter, maybe the participants' reluctance to form their own direct action groups was due to the fact that most of them only practised 'thin' methods of citizenship. Therefore, 'thicker' methods like social movement involvement may have been far beyond their personal comfort zones. In contrast, their unwillingness to create their own political involvement again might be an indication of what Eliasoph (1998: 154) would call a 'cynical chic' disposition, whereby citizens view political involvement as futile because they believe that they cannot do anything to change political/social issues. 'Cynical chic' was used to describe some of the participants in the previous chapter. This is because they were unwilling to partake in thick forms of citizenship like political deliberation because they believed they could not change people's viewpoints. Some of the attendees appear to have approached the rally in a similar way because while they were willing to support its message they were reluctant to push its agenda further.

8.4 Ineffectiveness of Popular Culture

Other sources summarised the rally negatively because of the popular culture and satirical aspects of the event. These particular responses were only evident in the newspaper analysis but they were not the reactions of the rally participants. The first response of this type came from Tom Hayden, a founding member and former president of the Students for a Democratic Society. He argued that:

> Experts on social movements and activism are sceptical that
> anything substantive will come out of the rally. Social movements
> are not about building ratings. No organisations will come out of
> this. No clubs will be formed and no chapters will be formed
> (Koeske 2010).

While Tom's response does not relate to the satirical aspects of the show, he was concerned that such a worthy political subject was being promoted by a popular culture TV show whose main concern was audience ratings. Timothy Noah, also had reservations about the message advocated by the rally:

> Humour has its place, and politics has its place. I have the
> growing suspicion that the participants in this rally don't entirely
> think of it as a comedy show. I think that they are mistaking this
> participation in this rally, they are mistaking it for some sort of

political statement and that confusion troubles me" (Norris 2010 writing for *NPR*).

Both sources are concerned that a satirical popular culture platform was being taken seriously by those that had come to support the civility message. This is because they see popular culture and satire as ineffective vehicles for instigating political involvement and channelling the civil political discourse message. This argument can also be viewed from a popular culture perspective because *TDS* is a show that it mass-produced, available to a large demographic of people and it is owned by media conglomerate Viacom whose aim is to make a profit (Street 1997: 7). In addition, the show incorporates populist rhetoric, sensationalism and fictional and entertaining elements, which, according to Fisk (1992: 55), are the defining features of popular culture texts. Unlike the sources in this section that criticised the infiltration of popular culture into political engagement platforms, scholars such as Schudson (2009) and Norris (2000) have argued the merits of its potential. For example, both argue that it can promote learning and citizenship, and it can offer alternative ways in which to understand events (Ibid). The rally's mix of popular culture and political issues could have been a suitable platform for political engagement. Nevertheless, the sources quoted at the beginning of this section raised some valid points about the limitations of popular culture, which are reflected in some of the findings already gathered in this study.

There is a wealth of academic research questioning the role of popular culture in democratic society. Strinati (1995: 10, 11) comments that it is a text purely marketed for profit and thus it denies intellectual challenge. In Robert Putnam's thesis *Bowling Alone* he argues that popular culture is detrimental to civic engagement and that it has a further adverse effect on politics, whether in the specific form of voting or general deliberation (Cited in Street et al 2013: 17). A similar sentiment is echoed by Neil Postman in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. He argues that entertainment television is destructive to the democratic process because the information it provides gives people something to talk about but it cannot lead to any meaningful political action (1985: 68). This last point certainly encapsulates the limitations of satirical humour and the impact of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. Indeed, the participants were willing to be part of an event where they shared the same values as others but they were less willing to exchange ideas or instigate forms of direct action. The absence of

a citizen call to action at the rally then might not be due to the limitations of satire. It might simply be the result of utilising a popular culture, entertainment driven medium [*TDS*] to promote a serious message about the state of American political discourse.

8.5 The Rally and *TDS* Intertwined

Another pessimistic response to the rally was that it replicated the *TDS* TV format too much. Online news resource, *The Wrap* (2010) summarised the rally as a "three hour live telecast that was neither political comedy nor comical politics, but a tepid hybrid of what the boys [Stewart and Colbert] bring to the boil every night on their respective shows". This not only supports Jon Stewart's interpretation of the rally as an extension and alternative platform for his TV show (Yen 2010a) but it also draws parallels with my own findings. The last chapter discussed how the rallygoers' attendance was not an example of activism but an extension of the role they adopt when watching *TDS* programme. Thus, rather than actively trying to change the current state of political deliberation they were simply supporting Jon Stewart and his ability to speak on their behalf about the current state of politics and journalism practice.

By considering the rally as an extension of the *TDS* programme this raises ideas about the impact of popular culture. As discussed earlier, *TDS* is considered a popular culture text for two reasons: first because of its content which includes elements of populism[29], fiction and entertainment (Fisk 1992: 55); and second because *TDS's* parent channel, *Comedy Central,* is owned by the world's fourth largest media conglomerate, Viacom. Viacom is a mass entertainment driven corporation whose interests reside in cinema and cable television channels such as *MTV, VH1* and Nickelodeon. Popular culture is therefore a central component of its programme structure and consequently of its success as a major media conglomerate along with profit making (Street 1997) and improving audience ratings (Baym 2010: 3, Corner & Pels 2003: 4). These attributes of success for a corporation like Viacom draw a number of parallels with *The Baltimore Sun's* (Zurawik 2010) interpretation of the rally:

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[29] In his role as satirist Stewart has been characterised by Day (2011) and Jones (2010) as the everyman stand-in that speaks on behalf of the public.

> The rally was almost worth attending. I say almost because
> *Comedy Central*, Stewart's employer and partner in this production
> on the Mall, didn't let me hear a great deal. They had to cut away
> to tell me that today's rally was brought to me by Volkswagon,
> Reese's Peanut butter cups and LG. And one of the things I think
> is most fascinating about the whole rally: the way Comedy Central
> essentially commodified all those folks who showed up on the
> Mall, rounding all of them up and delivering them to advertisers.

Zurawik's reaction suggests that the rally was a marketing opportunity that served audiences up to advertisers as opposed to advocating citizenship and the rally's civility message. This frame may have been used by the news media as a way of undermining the rally's message and those who came to support it. Zurawik does make a valid point, as profit and audience ratings are central to the success of a media corporation. Thus the rally may have been an opportunity to capitalise on the success of *TDS* brand by organising an event that would serve up thousands of people as advertising targets and potentially broaden the show's audience base. Reeves et al (2007: 95, 97) add weight to this assertion, by arguing how central *TDS* is to the success of this large media conglomerate; for example network executives describe it as "Comedy Central's SportsCenter, meaning that it is the show that attracts quality demographics like moths to a flame".

Indeed the rally may have been the perfect platform to target a wide range of audience demographics but it might also have been a way for Jon Stewart to advance his own career. Mark Halperin (2010), talking on *NBC*'s *Saturday Today* show, argued that, "Jon Stewart is doing this [organising the rally] for the attention. He does want more liberals in office than conservatives. But he is also there for himself and for his own advancement". Halperin's point is merely an opinion as opposed to fact, yet he does raise some valid ideas that are closely associated with TV talk show hosts and their rise to celebrity status. Stewart certainly falls into this category after winning countless awards[30] that have celebrated his achievements in news and entertainment. But, according to Hirsch, (1991: 182, 183) it is in the interests of celebrity talk show hosts to maintain their image by staying within the bounds of the celebrity system that created them. Organising the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' might have been Stewart

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[30] Stewart and *The Daily Show* have received Peabody awards for their contribution to news and entertainment as well as countless TV Critic and Emmy awards.

doing just that: hosting a global event to raise his profile but at the same time staying within the safe and familiar parameters associated with *TDS* programme.

8.6 Mixed Responses

Mixed responses were the second most popular reaction from the sources featured in the news analysis. For the interviewees though this was their dominant response to the event, as 15 out of 30 of them had mixed reactions when summarising their thoughts on the rally.

One response consistently found in the news analysis and interview process was that those who observed or attended the rally felt that it promoted a positive message but it did not do anything to eradicate the problem. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Timpane 2010) interviewed one attendee, who said: "I certainly enjoyed it, the rally's message was certainly applicable to the current political environment, but I wonder if the message was a bit lost in the show". Another rally participant, Joe Stroup featured in *The Lewiston Morning Tribune* (Yen & Woodward 2010) added, "The rally had an awesome message and music". However, he also added, "Is it going to bring lasting change? I doubt it". There was little difference in the interview responses to the event. Charvet Cicarlo[31], for example stated, "I think the rally did a great job of giving the government a message that we wanted civility, but it wasn't successful in getting a civil government". Diane Hosenbold[32] made a very similar point, "I think the rally and its message came across really well to the audience to whom it was intended. Do I think it changed any minds on the other side? Probably not".

The first impression evoked by these responses is that, despite the positivity surrounding the rally's message, the media again, attempted to undermine the rally's efforts by framing it as an ineffective event. This may be the case. However it is interesting that similar responses were also recorded by the participants during the interview process. Like the shared journalistic and participant responses found in the pessimistic section of this chapter, some of these sources also shared the same mixed reactions. This has been a common theme in many of the responses to the rally thus far - that it had a valid non-partisan message but it made absolutely no difference to the country's polarised political talk.   This is perhaps a result of many of the issues

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[31] Interview with Charvet Cicarlo 25 January 2013.
[32] Interview with Diane Hosenbold 27 January 2013.

raised in this chapter; that while the satirical and popular culture elements of the event were well received, they also prevented the rally from becoming a valid platform to instigate social change. Again this is because the rally simply highlighted the problems associated with polarised political talk; but it did not propose any serious collective action approaches that would help change the country's political tone. As discussed earlier, perhaps the rally participants expected too much from this satirical event. Or, alternatively, the rally's underlying satirical theme enabled Stewart to avoid responsibility and any criticisms aimed at the rally. Both of these points are certainly valid reasons that account for some of the negative responses aimed at the rally. Yet with the role of the satire artist limited to highlighting social ills and encouraging their audience to take action (Day 2011: 10), it might be that the participants should have re-evaluated what they really expected the rally to achieve.

The following responses are decidedly more analytical in tone because they directly question the implications of the event. Interestingly they came exclusively from journalists, a result perhaps of journalistic norms and conventions which place importance on balanced and objective accounts of news stories (Gans 1979). Williams (2010) writing for *Salon.com,* for example wrote:

> Was the rally the beginning of a new dawn in the American character? Did it cure hysteria, paranoia and rampant jerkwaddery? Only time will tell…It's still unclear whether this was a genuine call for action or nothing more than a comedic stunt.

Similarly, Schafer (2010) in his *Ground Report* article wrote:

> The impact of Stewart's rally remains unforeseen, but its message has an uphill battle. Indeed, Stewart has made a living over the past 10 years by calling politicians and pundits on the absurdity they create. If any change is to occur, it has to be done by the want of the media. And clearly, that want is not there, as absurdity and sensationalism sell.

These viewpoints are considerably more analytical than the other mixed responses because the journalists attempt to question the authenticity of the rally and its ability to change the political tone within the country. This might be viewed as a way of undermining the rally because disparagement of a movement's effectiveness is a common framing theme used by the news media when reporting social movements

(Gitlin 1980: 27). However, the journalists raise a number of legitimate concerns that have been raised throughout this study. For example, as an ambiguous event that has been described as political, apolitical, a comedy show and social movement platform it is understandable that Williams (2010) questioned its intentions. Schafer (2010) is also right to critique the rally's ability to change the current political communication process. After all, Jon Stewart, in his announcement at the rally, argued that it was the media and political system that were responsible for political polarisation. Yet, Schafer makes a valid argument that the media are central to helping instigate such changes to the country's political tone, a point that Stewart seemed to miss all together. Stewart appears to have the same utopian ideas about political deliberation as other democratic theorists who value citizen interaction as a way of helping to create political/societal changes. However, he fails to mention how central the media and political world would be to help change the way politics is played out in the public sphere. This might actually be another limitation of utilising satire as a call for action, as Stewart is unlikely to call on the very institutions that he openly criticises on a nightly basis. Charles Gruner (1997: 288) supports this argument with his own critique of satire, adding that it is intended to be both funny and damaging to the object of ridicule. There is a possibility then, that satirists like Stewart actually "hinder rather than help their cause "(Freedman 2009: 163) because they are attacking the people that could help change the current practices of political deliberation.

8.7 Optimistic Responses

Optimistic accounts of the rally were the least frequent response found in news media summaries of the event. In the majority of cases the optimistic responses indicated that the rally would have a positive impact because it would encourage political engagement. A participant quoted in *The Virginian-Pilot,* stated that, "The rally will encourage more political engagement in the lead up to Tuesday's election. It will boost the lacklustre season and hopefully bring a fraction of the energy that surrounded the 2008 election" (Rostami 2010). University professor Ethan Thomas made a similar assertion in his *Gannet News* (2010) article, adding that, "It may have the effect of encouraging people in the middle to vote". What can be gathered from these responses is that they are only optimistic because the media associated the event with the mid-term election. This frame was used again by the news media because it fits in with the conventional understanding of politics and thus their dominant framing

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of the rally; that it was a political event organised to help encourage democrats to vote in the mid-term election. By summarising the rally in this way the news media attached a 'horse race' frame to the rally, which associated the event with the impending election, even though the rally was not in fact political. This finding again, allows us to challenge the argument put forward by Baym (2010: 107), who suggests that the advantage associated with Stewart's use of satire is that it offers a measure of resistance to manipulation. In this case however, the rally was subject to reinterpretation by the media who characterised the event in relation to the election as opposed to its civility message.

Another response was that the rally could help instigate a new type of social movement that would challenge the current practices of political deliberation. Jeff Jarvis (2010) writing for *The Business Insider* stated, "the rally gave people a reason to come together, to set new standards, to expect real change, to celebrate democracy (not government), to communicate, in short, and in every sense of the word, to rally". John Avlon (2010) writing for *CNN* stated that:

> The rally's size and enthusiasm was evidence of a growing demand for something different, an alternative to predictable talking points and the partisan spin cycle. A desire for humour and honesty, independence and integrity. It is an opportunity and an obligation.

These responses show that there is a growing necessity to change current political communication practices. The rally then was viewed as the starting point of a potential movement that brought people to the same place in the hope that they would work together to create new standards for political deliberation. This response presents a similar view point to that of Baum (2003, 2005) who argues that soft news[33] can foster political attention among people who do not routinely tune in to traditional news programmes. This is because regular exposure to soft news is likely to increase attentiveness to hard news issues. Baum then views soft news outlets as the gateway to the consumption of more traditional news use. In accordance with Baum's work and the responses given by the journalists in this section, the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' could be characterised as a gateway for further political engagement. This is because the rally's mixture of comedy, popular culture and its non-partisan message produced a comfortable and non-threatening environment for citizens who

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[33] Soft news is a medium that mixes both popular culture and political information (Baum 2003, 2005)

might have been new to social movement events like protests or rallies. The accuracy of this statement however is questionable given the absence of collective action solutions used by the rally participants and the previous descriptions of them as 'cynical chic'.

In contrast to the responses given by media sources, those that were interviewed only discussed the rally positively when it fell into the following category: that it was able to bring a large group of people together that supported the same issues on political deliberation. Tom McCarthy[34] stated that, "It was a great experience because you just got the feeling that there were a lot of people that felt the same way as you did about how the political process should work so that was a great thing". Gerry Chatham made a similar point adding that:

> I found people were just generally happy to be there and I think everyone was enjoying the experience, even people who were way in the back. It was just the feeling of being part of that group that made people feel like they were part of something positive, and that's what I've taken away from it (Interview 10 February 2013).

A number of the interviewees reacted positively to the rally because Jon Stewart had tapped into a resource of people who identified with the rally's message and who felt unrepresented as citizens who opposed polarised political talk. This response appears to challenge the scholarly arguments put forward by Putnam (1995) and Baumgartner and Morris (2006) who criticise the role of popular culture and entertainment in politics.

In accordance with the interview responses in this section, comedy and popular culture can actually have the opposite effect by bringing people together who identify with the same practices and political ideas. Freud (1960: 149) believed that humour is a great way for citizens to escape the pressures and repressions of living in a hierarchical society. Humour worked in a similar fashion in Bakhtin's (1968: 10) study of the Carnival, where the event became a second life for people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community and freedom. Within this community people embraced laughter and ridicule because it was a demonstration of resistance to power and a way of confronting authority (Ibid: 13). The rally draws many similarities to

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[34] Research interview with Tom McCarthy 24 January 2013

the community depicted by Bakhtin, as it was described by Stewart (2010) as a place for rational people who were fed up with the extremist rhetoric practised by the media and political world. Humour and ridicule were used as a way of confronting politicians and specific media outlets on their vitriolic behaviour. In essence, the rally was a space where people could get together for fun and laughter and to call on the nation's leaders for more rationality in political discourse. According to Street et al (2013: 34), this is one of the many benefits of popular culture as it has the ability to connect with issues of public concern which also means connecting with issues that are of utmost importance to strangers who live in culturally and geographically distant contexts. This trend was evident in the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', as Jon Stewart used his satirical role to connect with a wide demographic of citizens who supported his call for a more civilised tone in the country's political discourse. In sum, these examples and scholarly arguments suggest that popular culture can help form a new politically engaged counter-public, who identify with similar political and social issues. The extent to which this counter-public identifies with 'thick' demonstrations of citizenship though remains to be seen when considering the results gathered in the last chapter.

8.8 Part 1: Summary of Findings

So far, this chapter has examined the way in which the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was interpreted by the sources that attended or observed the event. What can be seen is that most sources responded negatively when summarising their experience of the rally. These responses did not come exclusively from the news media, although, according to Gitlin (1980: 27), the news media are more inclined to report rallies or protest events in a disparaging light. In fact, negative responses were just as prevalent among the rally participants featured in news articles and those that were interviewed for this study.

The chief motivation behind the pessimistic responses was that the rally was an ineffective platform for political engagement. This supports numerous arguments put forward by scholars such as Postman (1985) and Putnam (1995), that popular culture is destructive to the formation of civic engagement because it does not lead to meaningful action. Scholarly (Griffin 1994, Freud 1960) critiques of humour and satire have also drawn similar conclusions about the limitations of the genre. They

have argued that it has no direct role in influencing politics or instigating direct action. An element of responsibility also lays with the rally participants because the event was a perfect opportunity for them to form their own avenues of political engagement and direct action. Such demonstrations of political participation were largely absent though because of the attendees reluctance to engage in 'thicker' acts of citizenship or because they cynically felt that they could not change current political communication practices.

The results thus far present a largely pessimistic view of the effectiveness of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. However, it is important to remember that many of the results were obtained directly after the event took place. The remainder of this chapter will explore media interpretations of the event in the months and years that followed to understand the way it was discussed and whether it made any further impact in the fields of politics and journalism. The way in which hybrid political satire is perceived will also be examined too.

8.9 Part 2: Post- Rally Interpretations and Impact

Given that the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' achieved very little in its immediate aftermath it was necessary to examine whether there were further interpretations of the event thereafter. Therefore, a second media analysis was carried out, in which global news articles, cable and network news scripts and other media platform stories featuring the key term 'Rally to Restore Sanity' were gathered and analysed. To encompass as many articles as possible, the sample period for this study was extensive as it attempted to gather articles published days after the event and those that might mention the rally up until April 2014. The sample of articles gathered was relatively small as only 48 in total mentioned the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. This was perhaps another indication that it was just a passing event that made little impact.

Before this study can make any claims about the rally's influence it is necessary to define what is meant by 'impact' and how this will be measured in relation to the after effects of the event. To do this the original definition of the rally from Chapter 6 was considered, i.e. that the event was 'political' in that it attempted to encourage civil political discourse and participation in audiences who were generally too busy to be politically active. Impact then is measured in relation to the legacy left by the event

and whether it led to specific instances of political action or other forms of change. This includes cases where news coverage continued to highlight the validity of the rally's civility message. In addition, it incorporates perceptions of the rally as a gateway for further political engagement such as advocating civility in politics. While they may not be directly linked to the rally's message, measurements of impact also include stories that allude to the increased success that *TDS* experienced since organising the rally. Measurements of impact are also applicable to *TDS* itself given the criticism surrounding the rally's ineffectiveness. As a result, this study examines news coverage that documents instances in *TDS* where it may have moved beyond its satirical stance to become more involved in social commentary and other forms of activism or advocacy.

8.10 Success for *TDS*

The first section of this chapter argued how the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' could be viewed as a marketing opportunity for Viacom because it may lead to further success and increased audiences for its cable channel *Comedy Central* and *TDS* brand. The second media analysis showed that this was the most prevalent response recorded with many news outlets linking the continued success of *Comedy Central* and *TDS* with the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. This was acknowledged in a number of ways from the various awards[35] for which the rally was nominated to articles referencing Stewart's powerful media role[36]. When Philippe Dauman (2010), CEO of Viacom, was interviewed on Bloomberg TV, he commented that:

> We have a lot of great hits on *Comedy Central*, but Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, the two of them together did the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. That day we had 250,000 people there and 2 million people watching on television on a Saturday afternoon.

This quote shows how the rally was able to bring in a large audience demographic, part of which came to the live event with a further 2 million watching from home, an impressive feat considering that the rally fell outside of prime time TV viewing hours. During this period, *Comedy Central* appeared to be revelling in its success with the rally being highlighted as a contributing factor. For example, Stelter (2011), writing for *The New York Times,* added that:

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[35] The 'Rally to Restore Sanity was nominated for 4 day time Emmy Awards (Kilday & Powers 2010).
[36] Jon Stewart acknowledged as one of the most powerful TV figures in America (Newsweek 2010)

> Despite being over 20 years old, it [*Comedy Central*] has never
> been more relevant and successful, and it is savouring its success
> from its last big hit, Jon Stewart's 'Rally to Restore Sanity'.

Both quotes from the news samples suggest that the rally contributed, in some way, to the continued success of the *Comedy Central* brand. However, the accuracy of this suggested causality is debatable when considering the following extract from an article in *Fair Disclosure* (2010):

> *Comedy Central* delivered another one for the record books with
> the highest-rated and most-watched third quarter in its history,
> expanding its audience by 15% year-over-year. The key driver of
> this success was its original programming. *The Daily Show* and
> *The Colbert Report* both delivered bigger audiences, and the
> influence that these two shows and their brilliant principles have
> on the national discourse is exemplified by the 'Rally to Restore
> Sanity'.

Here the reader is informed that the viewership has increased and that *TDS* and *The Colbert Report* are the driving force of this improvement. However, it does not cite the rally as the contributing factor. Instead the rally is mentioned as an example of the typical ideas and practices that encapsulate both shows: holding those in power accountable. Thus, while the event may have had some impact on the increased success and viewership of *Comedy Central* there may also have been other contributing factors like the election period. Young people in particular, according to Young and Tisinger (2006) and the Pew Research Centre (2000), turn to *TDS,* to learn about campaign information. The chief reason for this is unclear, although Feldman and Goldthwaite-Young (2008) argue that it leads to an increased interest in the campaign. More recently, a study carried out by the Annenburg Public Policy Centre (2014) discovered that the sister programme of *TDS*, *The Colbert Report,* was doing a better job than other news sources of teaching people about political campaigning, such as the legal loopholes in campaign financing. What these examples illustrate is that the increased viewership for *Comedy Central* might also be attributed to the way in which both *TDS* and *The Colbert Report* examined the election period. Thus the impact of these examples, accompanied by the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', may have collectively led to the increased success of both *Comedy Central* and its owner Viacom, rather than the rally alone.

8.11 Shifting the Boundaries of Satire

Another prevalent theme was how the rally acted as a gateway for Jon Stewart to immerse himself further into the fields of politics and journalism. The news media's chief example was Stewart's championing of the James Zadroger Act. This was a bill to provide healthcare for 9/11 first responders, but its implementation was stalled in the Senate due to GOP concerns that it would be too costly (Newton-Small 2010). Stewart was outraged by the lack of consideration for the people that had risked their lives to help others at Ground Zero and consequently used his *TDS* platform to take the media and political world to task for not making the bill a priority. Virtually all of the articles that mentioned the Zadroger Act also referenced the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' because they viewed the latter as a starting point for Stewart to become more heavily involved in advocacy journalism and political commentary. *The New York Times* (Stelter 2010) commented that, "Stewart had edged into an advocacy role [when advocating the Zadroger Bill], just like he did in October when he held the rally in Washington". A similar viewpoint was echoed in a *TV Squad* article (2010) that argued:

> Stewart turned from satirist, lobbing observational shots from the
> sidelines, to advocate, promoting a worthy issue that he feels hasn't
> gotten nearly the press coverage it deserved. It's a move that
> started with the Rally to Restore Sanity and has developed since
> then.

Both examples suggest that Stewart's advocacy of the Zadroger Act is a result of the role he adopted at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. But, as mentioned in many of the chapters thus far, Stewart vehemently denied that the rally was a political event that would change the political climate; thus perhaps the link is unwarranted. This also refutes the claims made by Stewart in his interview with Rachel Maddow (2010b), in which he argued that satire is limited because it does not help to build anything positive. There were instances however when articles relating to the 9/11 bill raised questions about the effectiveness and ambiguity surrounding the rally. But by highlighting these criticisms some articles suggested that Stewart had responded by becoming more directly involved in political causes like the Zadroger Act. This viewpoint was highlighted by Ari Shapiro (2010) on *NPR*:

> Some critics accuse Jon Stewart of missing an opportunity with
> that rally. They said he can bring hundreds of thousands of people
> to the National Mall, but for what, to what end? The passage of the
> 9/11 first responders health bill may answer that question.

As per the findings in the first half of this chapter, Shapiro also views the rally as ineffective. Yet Stewart has redeemed himself in light of his involvement with and support for the Zadroger Act. Beam (2010) writing for *Slate Magazine* also makes a similar assertion, adding that:

> At October's Rally to Restore Sanity…Stewart was careful not to cross the line into advocacy. He didn't even tell people to vote. He's just not "in the game," he told Rachel Maddow in an interview in November. "I'm in the stands yelling things, criticizing." Last week, Stewart stepped onto the field. The change came after Senate Republicans blocked a bill that would provide $7.4 billion in medical benefits to firefighters, police officers, and health workers who got sick from working at Ground Zero on and after 9/11.

According to both journalistic accounts, since the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' Stewart has adopted a more 'hands on' approach particularly in his involvement with political causes like the Zadroger Act. This suggests that Stewart's role as a satirical commentator has progressed to one that also includes journalistic and political advocacy. Sources within the news media appear to support this assertion as many credited his involvement to the passing of the 9/11 responders health care bill. The following extract from *The International Herald Tribune* (Carter & Stelter 2010) illustrates the praise bestowed upon Stewart in his efforts to help the bill pass:

> That show was devoted to the bill and the comedian's effort to right what he called "an outrageous abdication of our responsibility to those who were most heroic on 9/11." Mr. Specht said in an interview, "I'll forever be indebted to Jon because of what he did." Mr. Bloomberg, a frequent guest on "The Daily Show," also recognized Mr. Stewart's role. "Success always has a thousand fathers," the mayor said in an e-mail. "But Jon shining such a big, bright spotlight on Washington's potentially tragic failure to put aside differences and get this done for America was, without a doubt, one of the biggest factors that led to the final agreement."

Similar sentiments were also echoed by the FealGood Foundation, an organisation that prior to the passing of the Zadroger Act, provided economic support to first responders and volunteers who had suffered health problems as a result of 9/11:

> John Feal, founder of the FealGood Foundation who connected Stewart with the first responders who came on the show, says moving the bill toward passage has been a team effort. But he credits Stewart for its recent progress: "What Jon Stewart did

was he literally shamed conventional media and the U.S. government into doing the right thing. (Beam 2010)

Similarly to the role he adopts on the show and at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity', in this case Jon Stewart was able to use his satirical platform to highlight the political absurdities that arose when attempts were made to legislate health care allowances for 9/11 first responders.   In this instance, Stewart pushed the boundaries of his satirical role even further by aggressively campaigning and publicising the cause, which, in part, led to the Act being passed.   As highlighted in parts of this section, some journalists have labelled Stewart's response as a form of advocacy journalism, a practice that was adopted by two of America's most trusted journalists, Edward R. Murrow[37] and Walter Cronkite. This is no coincidence as Stewart has often been compared to both figures. Political journalist Maureen Dowd for instance, declared Stewart the 21st century equivalent of Cronkite and Murrow (Baym 2010: 6). This comparison has also been made by various other journalists who referenced the rally and the Zadroger Act. For example, *The New York Times* (Gross 2010) questioned whether the passing of the Act made Stewart the modern day equivalent of Edward R. Murrow and *The Independent* (Adams 2010) wrote that he was the reincarnation of the crusading reporters Murrow and Cronkite. It is not surprising then that Stewart has previously been voted the most trusted man in America. After all, examples such as the rally and the Zadroger Act show Stewart adopting a role that is committed to democratic responsibility: holding the powerful accountable and advocating causes that are in the public good. These are elements that are closely associated with the practise of fourth estate journalism.

Returning to the main premise of this section, which is concerned with the rally's potential impact, the evidence thus far shows that the media considered the rally a stepping-stone for Stewart to become more directly involved in the fields of politics and journalism. This premise certainly rings true when considering Stewart's promotion of the Zadroger Act, which was eventually passed in the US Senate. What can be deduced from this result is that Jon Stewart continues to immerse himself in the grey and overlapping areas of comedy news and politics. This is a tactic that

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[37] Edward R Murrow & Walter Cronkite are celebrated journalists. Both are known for pushing the boundaries of acceptable social commentary in journalism: Murrow for his critique of Joseph McCarthy during the 'red scare' and Cronkite for his open criticism aimed at the American government during the Vietnam War.

Baym (2010: 20) recognises as a new kind of public affairs media, which re-imagines the possibilities of political journalism in the post-network age. Stewart has certainly re-imagined the possibilities and boundaries not just of political journalism but of his own show too. Examples such as the rally, the Zadroger Act and other alternative formats to his show like *The Rumble*[38] are redefining the limits of satire and the idea that it is an ineffective platform for political action.

8.12 Tackling Partisanship & Polarisation

Following the rally and the mid-term election, news media discussions on the heightened extremism in political communication were rife. The rally became a by-product of this and was linked to news coverage that debated this issue and the need to change current deliberative practices. In the *Providence Journal* (2010) Joe Scarborough, a host for *MSNBC*, cited his support for Stewart's message at the rally. In the article he stated that: "I believe that having the 43rd and 44th presidents labelled as fascists by media figures is reason enough for Americans to seek a higher and more informed level of debate" (Ibid).

While this article in the *Providence Journal* article illustrates the support that people had for the rally's message it does not suggest that the event had any physical impact on the practices of political communication. Other articles that linked the rally to discussions around political polarisation did so by associating the event with the emergence of a new political organisation aimed at changing these destructive practices. This organisation is No Labels: a growing movement of Democrats, Republicans and Independents whose mission is to move America from the old politics of point scoring towards a new politics of problem solving. The articles that made this link did so by citing No Labels as a new opportunity for citizens and politicians to support a bipartisan approach to political action. *The Herald Sun* (2010) for example, stated that No Labels was hoping to mobilise and support a centrist political movement. *The New Zealand Herald* (2010) however provided additional context to the movement's emergence:

> When over 1000 people from across the US gather at a Columbia
> University lecture hall in New York City on December 13 to

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[38] *The Rumble* was a mock debate platform that took place in 2012 between Jon Stewart and *Fox News's* Bill O'Reilly. The debate platform was reminiscent of the presidential debates as both men answered a series of questions on issues ranging from healthcare to the state of the American news media.

What can be deduced from the group's mission statement and the news extracts is that
both the rally and the No Labels group were advocating a more civilised and centrist
approach to addressing political issues. Central to the groups aims are forging
solutions to the nation's problems with citizens from different political backgrounds
and affiliations. For example, the movement insists that it welcomes all Americans as
long as they are willing to collaborate with one another to seek shared success for
their country (No Labels 2014). The rally and the No Labels organisation share
similar visions on the way that politics is played out in the public sphere. Both openly
welcome people of different political persuasions and both champion a deliberative
democratic approach to political problem solving. Despite this it is unclear whether
the No Labels movement was created as a response to the rally or whether it had any
links to the event at all. In accordance with the information found in *The New
Zealand Herald* article, No Labels was launched in December 2010, 2 months after
the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. Consequently this suggests that the movement may
have emerged as a result of the rally. Yet, on close inspection of the No Labels
(2014) website it appears that the movement was established in spring 2010 as a result
of heightened political divisions after the passing of the Affordable Care Act. While
there may not be any causality between both the rally and the No Labels organisation
it is still important to examine the latter's potential impact and effectiveness in
promoting its message. After all, it advocates a very similar view point to that of the
rally. Yet its absence of popular culture elements might make it a more successful
and reliable platform for changing the way in which contemporary politics is
practised.

Unlike the rally, which was a one-off event, the No Labels movement has existed for
nearly 4 years and within that time it has made some impact on political culture in

America. From its inception, the movement, led by Governor Jon Huntsman and Senator Joe Manchin, has been recruiting members to its group of 'Problem Solvers' who work to develop concrete policy solutions to attract widespread support in Congress and help regain citizen trust in government (No Labels 2010). According to the No Labels website (2014), the Problem Solvers group are:

> Unlike anything that has existed on Capitol Hill, where there is no forum for large groups of Democrats and Republicans to actually meet together to work through problems. Each party has its own weekly meetings, but there is no opportunity to hear from or reason with the other side. The Problem Solvers offer a new way forward…they are committed to regular across-the-aisle meetings, embracing the new attitude of problem solving and being real leaders

The Problem Solvers commitment to bipartisan solutions has led to a number of triumphs and accomplishments for the organisation such as Congress passing elements of their proposed The No Budget, No Pay Act[39]. The group have also unveiled their own legislative package, 'Make Government Work!' which aims to help the government work better along bipartisan lines. The organisation has also established a citizen grassroots movement, which is available on the 'Citizen Toolkit' section of its website. Here people can organise their own bipartisan events, make their voices heard by taking part in local town hall meetings, and even contact congress directly regarding any issues that they have.

There is no question that No Labels has been more successful in promoting its aims than the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. After all, this is a political movement that has considerable resources and capabilities to help initiate changes to political deliberation. While it initially started as a grass-roots movement, No Labels also has a number of high profile political members who are members of Congress and the Senate. Also, unlike the rally, it offers citizens their own platform where they can become directly involved in creating policy solutions to rebuild peoples trust in government. Thus, while, there may not be any direct correlation between the rally and the No Labels movement, this example does support previous scholarly arguments regarding the limitations of both satire and popular culture. Thus to make a discernable impact on political and social issues, citizens would be better served by

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[39] The premise of this Act was that if Congress could not pass a budget, members would not be paid.

engaging with political groups and movements that adopt clear aims and collective action solutions.

8.13 Continued Criticisms of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'

The final prevalent theme was further criticisms of the rally itself. Liberal media figures took issue with the rally's false equivalency between left-wing and right-wing news outlets. *MSNBC* host, Keith Olbermann, who was targeted at the rally because of the angry rhetoric featured in his political reporting, was the first to criticise the rally. While he agreed with the idea that the tone in America needed to change he added that "a lot of us…had one major-defined problem with the rally. A false equivalence between what we do here [at *MSNBC*] and what *Fox News* and the like do there" (Olbermann 2010a). Liberal media figure and talk show host, Bill Maher (2010) echoed similar sentiments:

> If you're going to have a rally where hundreds of thousands of people show up, you might as well go ahead and make it about something.
>
> With all due respect to my friends Jon [Stewart] and Stephen [Colbert] it seems to me that if you truly wanted to come down on the side of restoring sanity and reason, you'd side with the sane and the reasonable and not try and pretend that the insanity is equally distributed from both parties. Keith Olbermann is right when he says he is not the equivalent of Glenn Beck. One reports facts and the other is pretty close to playing with his poop.

The main issue raised by both Olbermann and Maher was Stewart's equivocation between *Fox News* and the *MSNBC* news channel. Olbermann (2010b) went into great detail about why he was critical of this comparison. He cited one example in particular:

> Stewart suggests that both *Fox* and *MSNBC* both have an absence of sanity and that both are equally to blame for the divisions that he talks about. But how are they? Do both equally demonise religious minorities and corporatization of the country? *MSNBC* were against the Iraq war, yet how is it that a conservative billionaire [Rupert Murdoch], who hired a former Nixon campaign man [Roger Ailes] to run for the express purpose of espousing the same right wing view of the world…and gave millions of dollars to the Republican Party apparatus this year.

Olbermann's statement cites various issues and examples that challenge Jon Stewart's views by highlighting the disparities between the news networks. This coupled with the statements made by Maher and perhaps other criticisms of the rally, resulted in Stewart taking part in a 40 minute interview with *MSNBC's* Rachel Maddow, in which he defended the rally's intentions. Stewart directly addressed the main criticisms raised by Maher and Olbermann. He responded to Maher's criticisms, regarding the rally's lack of action by highlighting the limitations of the satirist's role: that he can criticise social ills but he cannot do anything to change them (Maddow 2010b). This is an approach that Stewart has used on countless occasions when sources have questioned his satirical/social commentator role. While satire clearly has its limitations this response also enables Stewart to alleviate himself from any criticisms aimed at the rally as well as distancing him from the premise that it had to achieve some form of social change.

The main criticism that Stewart spent most of his time addressing was the false equivalency of *Fox News* and *MSNBC*. He felt that both Olbermann and Maher had raised valid points, but that this was not the seminal thrust of the rally. The main idea according to Stewart (Maddow 2010b) was:

> The intention was not to say that's what people on the left say and that's what people on the right say. The intention was that we have all bought into that conflict between left and right especially the news networks. It has become tribal. The 24 hour news networks have their way of shutting down the debate and highlighting the conflict between both sides. But I don't think this is the main conflict in our society. That was the point of the rally.

Stewart's response not only challenged Maher and Olbermann's criticisms of the rally but he also demonstrated how ingrained the left and right argument has become within the national dialogue. Despite the inherent differences between both *MSNBC* and *Fox News* both networks, and many others news media platforms, are guilty of perpetuating the divide between left and right. Consequently this has become the dominant discourse within the country, which has resulted in an absence of news on more pressing matters that are of political and social concern. This was a point that both Olbermann and Maher clearly missed in their summaries of the event.

In sum, the criticisms of the rally's equivocation between *Fox News* and *MSNBC* led Stewart to defend his intentions behind the event. Both before and during the rally, it

was an event that was rife with ambiguities. Yet the Maddow interview enabled Stewart to provide a much clearer and concise explanation of the rally's fundamental principles, albeit a little too late. For example, in Olbermann's and Maher's responses, it can be seen that the rally's 'real' message and intentions were not clear; this was perhaps a result of the multifaceted nature of the event.   Thus, while some may have viewed the rally as a political or popular event, the responses from Maher and Olbermann provide a very different interpretation of it: one that perpetuates the often aggressive divide between the left and right wing media.

8.14 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to examine how sources viewed the effectiveness of the rally and its potential legacy and impact thereafter. It can be argued that the event was predominantly summarised through pessimistic responses expressed by the media and rally attendees because they considered it an ineffective platform for political engagement   Their chief explanation for this was that there was no strategy or collective action approach in place to help instigate a more civilised political tone. Collective action approaches are generally associated with social movement studies. Consequently this is an interesting result because, at the beginning of this chapter, it was decided that measuring the effectiveness of the rally via social movement theory was unnecessary due to the apolitical nature of the event and its absence of collective action solutions. Yet, it appears that many sources did consider the rally a political event due to its links to the election and also because they wanted the event to help change the country's polarised political rhetoric. Social movement theorists such as Meyer (2004: 126) and Gamson (1992: 323) might also consider the rally as an 'ineffective' platform. Again, this is because of its absence of direct action approaches that include broader results such as routine access to power and influencing or changing policy.

The catalyst behind many of the pessimistic responses was the rally's inclusion of satire and popular culture. Sources believed that this limited the scope and power of the event because it was more concerned with entertaining people than changing the political process. This presents a rather pessimistic view, not just of the rally but also of other media platforms that mix politics and popular culture. It is a result that draws many parallels with the work of Postman (1985) and Putnam (1995), who view such

formats as ineffective and destructive to the formation of civic engagement. This is because popular culture texts are marketed for profit thus they are generally formulaic and deny intellectual challenge (Strinati 1995: 10). Consequently, this might explain why some sources complained that the rally was too similar to the structure of *TDS* and why it failed to instigate a social movement approach like collective action solutions. Instead it was safer and more financially beneficial for the rally and *TDS* brand to stay within the safe and familiar parameters associated with the show.

This chapter also highlighted how satire was responsible for limiting the power and success of the rally because it was characterised as an ineffective social movement platform. The conflicting definitions of satire documented in this study show that it can attack institutions and draw attention to social ills. However, according to Bakhtin (1968), Griffin (1994), Freud (1960) and Kernan (1965), it does not have the power to help change political or social issues. Perhaps then the disappointment expressed towards the rally should be aimed at the participants too. After all, they could have treated the rally as a gateway for further political engagement by implementing their own direct action solutions. Their reluctance to engage in thicker demonstrations of citizenship could be due to their lack of experience or their 'cynical chic' disposition. Eliasoph (1998: 154) argues that this is when citizens view political involvement as futile, because they believe that they cannot instigate social change. Adopting such an approach however might also be linked to regular engagement with political satire, which according to Baumgartner and Morris (2006: 341), increases feelings of apathy towards political participation.

Despite the negative interpretations of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' this study felt it necessary to analyse perceptions and the potential impact that the event had in the months and years that followed. In accordance with the measurements of impact set out at the beginning of this chapter the newspaper analysis showed that, in the majority of cases, the rally appeared to make no impact at all. Indeed this was the case when considering the rally together with the political movement No Labels, and what it has been able to achieve as a result of its clear aims and objectives. Clearly, this is another finding that demonstrates the limitations of popular culture and satire as described by Postman (1985), Griffin (1994) and Freedman (2009) and how they lack the power to create political change. The ambiguous and multifaceted nature of

the rally may also have contributed to its lack of impact on polarised political talk. Even Jon Stewart's supporters (Olbermann and Maher) were unclear about its fundamental purpose, which is why Stewart felt it necessary to defend its intentions following the criticisms from his peers.

It can be argued that the rally was not completely ineffective as it was linked to a number of media stories that illustrated the power of the event. But in most cases the impact was not related to the rally's civility message but to the commercial success that the rally had achieved for Viacom, *Comedy Central* and the *TDS* brand. Thus despite the rally's inability to alter America's polarised political discourse its inclusion of popular culture and satire helped attract more viewers to the show. This is a finding that certainly reflects the intentions of popular culture in infotainment platforms because it is profit orientated and ratings driven (Baym 2010: 3, Corner & Pels 2003: 4, Strinati 1995: 10).

One area that reflected the positive long-term impact of the event was the subsequent changes that took place in *TDS*'s approach to satirical news reporting. The analysis of the news coverage found that the rally was considered the gateway for Jon Stewart to become more directly involved in the fields of both politics and advocacy journalism. With many sources attributing the passing of the Zadroger Act to Stewart's involvement, it can be seen that he has evolved the genre of hybrid political satire from a critical platform to one that has the potential to create political change. This example appears to challenge the powerlessness discourses surrounding satire (Stewart 2010, Kernan 1965: 5) and shows how, like political journalism, its boundaries can also be re-imagined to make way for direct action.

In sum, the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was considered an ineffective platform for political engagement by the news media and the sources featured in their articles because of its absence of collective action solutions and its inclusion of comedy and satire. It is of no surprise then that the rally failed to make any impact at all on the way in which polarised politics is played out in the American public sphere. While the rally might not be the single contributing factor, the results also show that the event was not completely ineffective as it led to increased audience ratings and challenged ideas about what satire can achieve. In the chapter that follows, these findings and

those gathered in chapters 6 and 7, will be examined to provide a broader understanding of the rally and the contribution it has made to our understanding of politics and hybrid satire and its audience.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Introduction

The aim of this study was to examine the media representation of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' and understand how and in what way the participants engaged with it. This thesis has documented that the rally was a unique event organised by *Daily Show* host Jon Stewart and that it was formed as a response to concerns about the practice of journalism in the post-network era and its detrimental impact on the formation of an informed, deliberative and political active citizenry. These concerns have been noted by scholars who argue that there has been a decline in quality political news programming (Kellner 1991, Hallin (1994) and a reduction in policy discussion and political solution building (Oates 2008: 94). The rally's core issue concerned the rise of partisan news programming, which has become dominated by a vicious, hyperbolic, rhetoric (Jones et al 2012), which has narrowed the diversity of voices in the public sphere (Cushion 2012: 103). It is the combination of these approaches that has been identified as the media "abandoning their fourth estate role" (Baym 2010: 170), which could lead to the formation of an uninformed and misguided citizenry (van Zoonen 2005: 11, Putnam 2000, Postman 1995). Concerns have also been raised about partisan news and its ability to polarise audiences' opinions, which can lead to reluctance to engage in deliberative compromise (Jamieson & Capella 2008, Mutz & Martin 2001).

To address these concerns, the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' encouraged the American people to gather on the Washington Mall to send a message to the country's leaders and national media pleading for civility and rationality in American political discourse. This was a request that resembled the mobilisation techniques of protestors and activists, not a cable TV satirist. Holding people in power accountable was not unfamiliar territory for Jon Stewart. Much of the research on *TDS* confirms that the show provides a critical insight, context and deconstruction of media and political discourses (Anderson & Kincaid 2013, Baym 2010, 2005, Weisman 2011, Jones 2010, Baym 2010).

The rally offered a new and unique way to study hybrid satire because, on this occasion, *TDS* had shifted from the safe realms of cable TV to the field of politics and protest in a public forum. This was a doubly unique event because, unlike the TV

show that uses satire to draw attention to social and political ills, the rally attempted to push the boundaries of satire further by using it to help change America's political dialogue. Whether the rally could achieve this aim was questionable. Scholars have argued that the genre is only capable of highlighting social problems, not changing them or instigating direct action (Griffin 1994, Freud 1960, Kernan 1965, Freedman 2009).

Researching the rally was a chance to examine *TDS* audience and the type of people that engage with this alternative platform of hybrid satire. Currently much of the scholarly research on *TDS* audiences is divided into two camps, which argue the positive and negative effects of the show on its audience. For example, although *TDS* can serve the informational needs of its audience, the satirical nature of the show can also encourage cynical and apathetic dispositions towards politics and civic participation (Baumgartner & Morris 2006, Bennett 2007, Feldman 2007).

The above examples present a conflicting representation of what satire can achieve politically and its potential impact on citizenship practices. These arguments illustrate the importance of examining the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' because, unlike other *TDS* research, this study has examined a stand-alone event where *TDS* (albeit through an alternative platform) and its audiences were brought together through a shared idea - civil political discourse. This study, then, has addressed the gap left by other researchers by examining how the rally was framed and perceived by the news media and the people that attended. In addition, this study gave me, the researcher, the opportunity to provide a more in-depth examination of the citizenship practices of *TDS* audiences and an understanding of their relationship and conduct at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1) In what ways did the news media frame the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'?

2) In what ways did the news media frame the rallygoers?

3) What motivated the rallygoers to attend the event?

4) In what ways do the rallygoers participate in politics more broadly?

5) In what ways did the rallygoers participate at the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'?

6) How did the news media and rallygoers perceive the effectiveness of the rally and its long-term impact?

To provide comprehensive answers to these core research questions, 4 methodological approaches were used: ethnography, content analysis, framing analysis and interviews with the rally participants. This concluding chapter, then, will start with a summary of the empirical findings which will directly answer the main research questions. This will be followed by a discussion of the wider implications of the results, which will include satire's power to encourage citizen mobilisation and also the limitations of the genre and how this restricted the rally's ability to change the nation's political dialogue. It will also examine the behaviour of the rallygoers and how contributing factors such as the absence of emotion and potential cynicism and political polarisation limited their participation at the event.

9.1 Answers to the Central Research Questions

In answer to RQ1 the rally was predominantly framed by the news media as a politically motivated event contrary to Stewart's apolitical intentions. The dominant frames were those that characterised the rally as an event that would encourage the participants to vote during the congressional mid-term election. These were closely followed by frames that suggested that the rally was a mobilisation platform for citizens to campaign for civility in politics. Indeed a variety of other frames were also featured in the news media reports, which reflected the original argument in Chapter 6 that it was a multifaceted event, which made it difficult for the media to characterise it through one overriding description.

In response to RQ2, the news media used 3 dominant ways in which to frame the attendees. They were described in terms of the carnivalesque traits associated with their attire and signs. The media also chose to frame them as 'young' left-leaning citizens. Social movement scholars might argue that the use of these particular frames was an attempt by the news to undermine their aims and presence (Murdock 1981, Gitlin 1980). This is because the frames detracted attention away from the participants who had attended the event to support the rally's message. Also, the negative stereotypes associated with young people and the multiple reasons for engaging with the rally via carnivalesque strategies presented an image of the attendees as an ineffective group that lacked a unified message and strategy.

In answer to RQ3, it was found that the ambiguous nature of the rally led to a range of different motivations for attendance. While a small proportion of the participants attended the rally simply to have fun, the vast majority came to support its civility message and to be with like-minded people who advocated a more deliberative approach to political communication practices.

RQ4 was concerned with the civic participation habits of the rallygoers to establish whether the rally was a welcoming space for those who had little experience of citizen engagement with politics. The results show that the rallygoers were already politically active prior to the rally, which supports citizens Goldwaite-Young and Esralew's (2011:112) findings that *TDS* audiences are engaged in high levels of political participation. Their study however did not establish the type of political participation that is practised by *TDS* viewers, unlike this study, which found that it was mainly via 'thin' acts of citizenship like voting and petition signing.

In answer to RQ5, the results show that the level to which the rallygoers participated at the event can be characterised as a 'thin' demonstration of citizenship. None of the rallygoers utilised or discussed collective action solutions regarding how civility in politics could be restored. Their attendance and conduct at the rally then was not a demonstration of activism or agency but an extension of the role they adopt when watching *TDS* programme – supporting Jon Stewart and his ability to speak on their behalf about the current state of politics and journalism practice.

In answer to RQ6, it was found that journalists and the attendees alike concluded that the rally was an ineffective platform for sustained political engagement. This was due to the event's inclusion of comedy and satire and its absence of strategies and solutions to help change current political communication practices. Consequently it is unsurprising that, when evaluating the rally's impact, it was found that it failed to change America's political dialogue. While it might not have been the single contributing factor, the event was not completely ineffective as it led to increased ratings for *TDS*. Furthermore, the event was reported as a gateway for Jon Stewart to become more directly involved in the fields of politics and advocacy journalism with the Zadroger Act being a chief example.

9.2 Wider Research Implications

What this accumulation of evidence shows is that the rally was limited in its potential to 'restore sanity' to America's political dialogue because of two major factors: the ambiguity and satirical nature of the event, and the behaviour and conduct of the rallygoers.

Indeed the rally was successful in its ability to garner attention and support from the public, because over 250,000 Americans attended, most of whom identified with its core message. This is a significant achievement given that scholars like Putnam (1995: 67) argue that many citizens in contemporary society are psychologically disengaged from politics. This is one of the many benefits of mixing popular culture traits with politics, as Street (1997, also see Street et al 2013) has argued that it can connect people with like-minded individuals and communities. The rally was able to capture the American public's attention by following the same successful formula that is used on *TDS* TV programme: using meaningful assessments of politics and critiques of how the news rarely serves the public good (Jones 2010: 235). Furthermore, it attempted to challenge the authoritative discourses of journalistic and political actors (Jones et al 2012: 36) by calling on them to end their partisan bickering.

The rally became an alternative venue for *TDS*'s critical/satire platform but, unlike the TV show, the rallygoers could take part and engage with the event in a public space. While this was not an approach that the show had taken before, Jones et al (2012), Gross (2010), Day (2011) and Baym (2007), argue that Stewart and Colbert's ability to transport their critiques and performances into other arenas have had numerous payoffs in the past. The same statement is not entirely applicable to the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' because, despite the huge turnout of participants, this study found that the multifaceted and satirical nature of the event prevented it from successfully pushing its civility message.

The Limitations of Hybrid Content

The rally's main weakness was the ambiguity surrounding it because its meaning and intentions were not entirely clear. Jones et al (2012: 42) concur with this viewpoint, and argue that neither Stewart nor Colbert asserted an interpretative framework to direct meaning-making at the rally. Mobilising the American people en masse to the

Washington Mall in order to send a message to the country's leaders and national media suggests that the rally could have been an activist or political advocacy event. But over time Stewart began to downplay the rally's intentions by announcing that it was non-political event where like-minded people could get together for fun. A number of other factors like the rally's location, speculation about the event's intentions and its proximity to the election illustrate the multi-faceted nature of the event. As a product of the post-network era, ambiguity has become the driving force of *TDS* due to the fluidity of its programme content that mixes critical inquiry and satire. According to Baym, (2005: 6) the interpretive openness of the show is one of its key assets because of its ability to rethink discursive styles and standards and open up spaces for significant innovation. While the hybrid and ambiguous nature of *TDS* has been successful in the realms of television, this study found that it did not translate as well outside of its customary format. The media's reporting of the rally demonstrated that the numerous ideas surrounding it and its absence of a clear call to action led to confusion in reporting the event. As highlighted in Chapter 6, this is because the rally fell outside of the normative frameworks of demonstration and protest reporting highlighted by scholars such as Murdock (1981) and Gitlin (1981). As a result, this led to a lack of detailed coverage of the event and instances where it was misread or completely reinterpreted by the journalists reporting it.

The rally advocated a non-partisan deliberative democratic approach to political talk, and while there were instances where this frame was used, in most cases the rally was reinterpreted as a political event that was linked to the mid-term election. This finding does not just challenge Baym's (2010: 107) argument that Stewart's use of satire offers a measure of resistance to manipulation. In fact it shows that the news media added entirely new interpretations to the rally that reduced it to conventional framing of institutional politics by focusing on voting and horse race coverage that has become common practice during election periods (Dahlgren & Sparks 1997: 12, Oates 2008)

The Limitations of Satire
This study has highlighted the limitations of satire and subsequently the rally's inability to create political change. Despite the praise bestowed on *TDS*, Jon Stewart has always downplayed the show's journalistic potential by emphasising its comedic elements and refuting suggestions that he has any social or journalistic responsibility

(See Moyers 2011, Maddow 2010b, *Crossfire* interview (2006). Stewart applied a similar argument to the rally because of the ambiguous nature of the event and its inclusion of satire and popular culture. Stewart's defence is the epitome of satire in that it is a form of criticism without responsibility. This is because it can criticise targets but it does not have the power to help build something positive (Maddow 2010b). The rally's inability to help change the nation's dialogue is supported by a wealth of scholars who argue that satire is a form of attack that has no direct role in influencing political action because it does not initiate change (Freud 1960, Day 2011, Freedman 2009, Griffin 1994, Kernan 1965). These findings allude to the rally's absence of clear aims and objectives because the events original intention for civility in political discourse went far beyond the realms and capabilities of what many believe satire can achieve.

These findings suggest that Stewart could evade responsibility for the rally's ineffectiveness by highlighting his role as a satirist as defence. It was an approach that Stewart subtly referenced in his rally speech, in which he commented that it was the responsibility of ordinary Americans to work together and "get things done" (Brown 2010). But in actual fact Stewart could no longer stand behind his satirical defence in the same way that he would have done with his TV show. This is because most of the attendees viewed the rally as a politically motivated event but were left disappointed by its absence of collective action solutions and strategies. Despite the ineffectiveness of the rally's message, this research shows that the accumulation of responses criticising its ineffectiveness may be partly responsible for Stewart becoming more heavily involved in the fields of politics and advocacy journalism. This was evident in the media's reporting of the US Senate's passing of the Zadroger Act, which was attributed to Stewart's support and advocacy for the bill. By adopting a more 'hands on' approach to politics and journalism since the rally, Stewart has challenged his original argument about the limitations of satire and those put forward by satire scholars, by redefining its boundaries and highlighting its potential as a platform for political action.

Debating the Rally Participants
Another contributing factor limiting the rally's effectiveness was the conduct and behaviour of the people that attended. Indeed the rally was successful in bringing like-minded people together who identified with the rally's civility message. This

result reflects the research of Norris (2000), Schudson (2009), Day (2011) and Street (1997 & et al 2013) who argue the merits of both satire and popular culture in encouraging civic participation because they connect people together on an emotional level. Their attendance was not an example of activism but a 'thin' act of citizenship and an extension of the role they adopt as *TDS* viewers: supporting Jon Stewart in his role as their citizen surrogate (Day 2011: 10, Jones 2010: 238) who airs social grievances on their behalf.

Many of the rallygoers blamed their lack of sustained involvement at the rally on its absence of political action strategies. Having collective action solutions in place, may have encouraged the rallygoers to adopt 'thicker' acts of citizenship at the rally, which may have contributed to changes or further discussions on current political communication practices. It appears then that the rally was not entirely responsible for failing to create a more civilised political tone in the US because an element of blame also resided with the rallygoers. They could have used the rally as an opportunity to create their very own collective action solutions or forums through which to combat the issues raised at the rally. However, this study has shown that their limited involvement at the rally might have been a result of other contributing factors.

Jon Stewart wanted rational middle ground Americans to attend the event because they are the antithesis of the overly emotional and extremely polarised discourses represented in political news. Stewart was advocating the theoretical frameworks of Habermas (1984) and deliberative democracy theorists who emphasis civil political discussion over emotional or passionate debate (Dahlgren 2009, Christiano 1996, Washbourne 2010). But in a setting that was perceived by rallygoers and the media as a potential activism/political event, scholars including Gamson (1992: 32), Mouffe (2005), Goodwin et al (2001), Flam & King (2005) and Eyerman (2005), argue that the presence of emotion is central to instigating political action. Stewart's request for polite rational behaviour at the rally may have encouraged people to support the rally's premise. But without the presence of passion and agency their involvement was unlikely to translate into political action that would help change current communication practices.

This study also found contradictions in the participants' support for the rally's civility message and how they practise and engage with politics on a day-to-day basis. Many of interviewees were unwilling to engage in deliberative discussions with people who have different political opinions to their own. These scenarios often became heated and confrontational because neither side were able to change the other's point of view. The central issue here is how could the rally supporters expect the national media and political arena to practise rational deliberation when this was something that they were unable to engage in themselves? Their unwillingness to partake in 'thicker' demonstrations of citizenship such as deliberative compromise or collective action solutions at the rally could have been a result of their engagement with popular culture and satire. This is a finding that reflects the work of Putnam (2000) and Postman (1985) who believe that entertainment can be detrimental to civic engagement because, while it provides citizens with information, it does not lead to any meaningful action. In addition, scholars (Williams & Carpini 2011, Baumgartner & Morris 2006, Feldman 2007) have also attributed satire to encouraging political cynicism in its audiences, which leads to disengagement from the political process. The rallygoers were not completely disengaged from politics as the research demonstrates that they were politically active individuals. Nevertheless, cynicism is certainly a compelling argument to describe their actions at the rally and when they were confronted with deliberative situations.

The links between the rallygoers and cynicism reflect Nina Eliasoph's (1998: 154) research on cynical chic: an attitude that closes off avenues of political involvement because citizens convince themselves that they cannot do anything to change political issues. An alternative, but nonetheless convincing argument to the participants' hostility towards deliberative compromise concerns their engagement with partisan news. A number of the rally participants identified themselves as left-leaning citizens who engaged with a number of left-wing news outlets. Consequently their attitudes and inability to take part in bipartisan discussions draw similarities to the work of Jamieson and Capella (2008: 246) and Mutz and Martin (2001) who have argued that by not being open to oppositional viewpoints deliberative compromise and discussion becomes a lost art form. Perhaps, then, the combination of audience engagement with hybrid satire and partisan news platforms has fuelled their cynical and polarised attitudes towards deliberative compromise and solution building.

The findings relating to the political participatory habits of the rallygoers and their conduct at the event illustrate the inherent difficulties in achieving deliberative compromise in contemporary society. Furthermore they demonstrate the naivety of the rally's aims to try and help solve political problems through this approach. Indeed Jon Stewart was right to hold the media and political system accountable for partisan polarisation. But his argument, that 70-80% of the American population were reasonable people who could help solve political and social issues through rational deliberation, is challenged by the results in this study. While the sample of people interviewed for this study was relatively small and not representative of the rallygoers as a whole, the study did find a demographic of people that were unwilling to enter into political discussion for fear of offending people or because they considered it a pointless task. The rally's desire to achieve a civilised bipartisan tone in America's political dialogue is, for the most part, still an ambition that is yet to be fully achieved. Mutz (2006: 10) concurs with this, arguing that while deliberative compromise is advocated in theory, it is much less popular in actual practice. However with the emergence of bipartisan political organisations like No Labels who present clear strategies for 'across the aisle' problem solving, then perhaps deliberative compromise has a better chance of succeeding.

9.3 What Next? Recommendations for Future Research

While this study has presented some significant findings about the rally and its participants it has also opened up avenues for future research and investigation. Successful satire programmes like *TDS* and *The Colbert Report* have gradually moved outside of the safe confines of TV and are establishing themselves more assertively in the fields of politics, journalism and public debate. It is necessary, then, to examine future instances whereby satire artists can utilise these alternative platforms to communicate specific messages and engage with their audiences. Such studies could endeavour to understand more about satire's activist and advocacy potential in order to see whether it can become more directly involved in political problem solving or whether it remains limited in its capabilities. An addition to this research would be a close examination of audiences who engage with such platforms. While this study and Day (2011) have identified the merits of satire and its ability to bring communities together this is still a relatively new field of research and little time has been spent examining its effect and impact on its followers. As discovered in this

study, the participants engaged with the rally in a multitude of ways, and even for those who embraced its message this did not necessarily lead to political mobilisation. Future studies should concentrate on understanding more about the role that citizens adopt when engaging with satirical activists platforms and their potential to create political change.

Another valid field for potential future research is the news viewing habits of satire audiences. This study has demonstrated the potential causality between engagement with satire and partisan news and how this can encourage political cynicism and polarisation. These were questions that were asked during the interview stage of this study, but given the small size of the sample this is something that merits investigation on a much larger scale to understand its long-term impact and effects. Also, because this study discovered that a large demographic of senior citizens identify with *TDS* it would be interesting to study their reasons for engaging with the show. This would fill the current gap left by other *TDS* scholars who are chiefly concerned with young people's relationships with hybrid satire.

In light of the continued popularity of the partisan news model it is necessary to research the effectiveness of bipartisan political organisations and their presence in the mainstream media. This study shows that the rally was limited in its attempts to change deliberative practices. Yet organisations such as No Labels with their clear call to action strategies have been able to achieve some changes in bipartisan legislation. A study involving ethnography to examine the tactics and strategies of these organisations and media analysis of their publicity would enable the researcher to understand how or whether political action groups can challenge what Jon Stewart (Maddow 2010) has described as the "major fight within America": the fight between left and right. Furthermore, would these groups be able to develop a more civilised and rational tone in America's political discourse?

9.4 Limitations of Research
While this study has offered an evaluative perspective on the limitations of hybrid satire and its impact on audiences it is important to note the limited scope of the research. The interview process in particular provided a wealth of interesting findings on the political participatory habits of *TDS* audience, but only a small sample of 30 respondents were interviewed. The findings therefore are not completely

representative of *TDS* audience and the rally participants as a whole. This study could have benefitted from the inclusion of other methodological approaches, such as surveys to ensure a larger sample and a wider range of opinions from the respondents. Nevertheless, given the gap in the scholarly research regarding the active citizen habits of *Daily Show* audiences, at the very least, this study provides a new perspective on their reluctance to take part in deliberative discussions.

Another limitation of the research was that a relatively small sample of 210 articles was obtained for the media framing analysis. Measures were put in place[40] to ensure that a wide variety of articles were included in the sample. Yet some news stories, for example, those found on local American TV networks, were not included because the LexisNexis Database only includes transcripts from the National TV and Cable networks. While the inclusion of these additional stories may have affected the analysis of the media framing approach, this study still offers a detailed insight into the media's framing of the rally. This is accompanied by additional findings courtesy of the interviewees and my field notes.

9.5 Conclusion
This study of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' has demonstrated the power and influence of hybrid satire and its ability to mobilise citizens and connect them with an event that called for a more civilised tone in America's political dialogue. This is a difficult feat in contemporary society; as the research shows, citizens are becoming psychologically disengaged from the political process. Of course, given the ambiguous nature of the rally, not all of the participants identified with its central message. Nevertheless, the event gave these people a platform in which to voice their opinions whether this was through humour or advocacy for another political cause.

The rally however appeared to be more focused on drawing people's attention to the problem with current communication practices rather than realistically changing how this discourse is played out in the public sphere. The collection of methodological approaches used in this study illustrates that the multifaceted nature of the event, accompanied by its lack of clear aims and objectives, meant that it made no impact on

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[40] The research process ensured that global media outlets were included when searching for articles and only a broad search term the 'Rally to Restore Sanity' was used, again to guarantee that any articles about the rally were not excluded.

current political communication practices. But before confining hybrid satire to just highlighting social ills, Stewart's actions after the rally[41] show that, similarly to pushing the boundaries of journalism, he pushed the capabilities of the satire genre by making it a more suitable terrain for political action.

The rally also acted as a unique environment in which to understand more about the people that engage with *TDS*. This study illustrates that *Daily Show* viewers are politically active citizens but their attendance at the rally was more akin to the role they adopt when watching *TDS*. Many of the participants blamed their limited involvement at the rally on its lack of clear aims and objectives, but the research shows that other contributing factors such cynicism and political polarisation might also have been responsible.

In sum, the findings of this thesis go beyond the confines of this single case study of the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'and can be applied more broadly to the study of hybrid satire and the political behaviour of those that engage with platforms such as *TDS*. The significance of this research is that it illustrates how satire can be a suitable platform for political participation because it connects communities together that identify with its message. But most importantly it shows how satire might only offer its audience a very limited way of being politically active because the genre, in most cases, can only draw attention to social ills rather than offering collective action solutions. The result is that citizen participation is limited to a 'thin' act of citizenship where they identify with and support the satirist's message but this is the full extent of their involvement. However, to hold satire responsible for limited demonstrations of political behaviour is far too simplistic. This study has shown how other factors including the limited time that citizens have to be politically active and their engagement with popular culture and partisan news might also contribute to political cynicism and thin acts of citizen participation. Therefore, in the future, when examining the political behaviour of citizens who engage with political satire this study recommends that such an analysis should also consider these other contributing factors before claims are made about their limited participatory habits.

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[41] Specifically his support for and advocacy of the Zadroger Act.

While this accumulation of results has argued the limitations of satire and subsequently the limited political participatory role of satire audiences this study believes that such arguments will be challenged in the future. This is because this study has shown how the boundaries of satire are continually shifting to incorporate new ways of communicating politics and connecting with audiences. This is why further studies of hybrid satire are imperative, as it would broaden the scope of current research by investigating whether the genre can move from its current platform of critical inquiry to demonstrations of political action.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Introductory Questions
    1) Name
    2) Where are you from
    3) Anything you would like to add about yourself,

Icebreaker Questions
Tell me about your relationship with *TDS*?
    1) How long have you been watching it?
    2) Why do you watch it?
    3) Prompts – what do they enjoy about it?
    4) Do you also watch the *Colbert Report*?
    5) Do you watch these shows for the same reasons?
        Do you see any differences between the shows?

Rally Questions
    1) When you first heard about the rally what was your impression of it?
    2) Why did you decide to attend?
    Prompt – were you representing a specific cause (political?)
    3) Tell me about your day there? What did you do while you were there?

    4) What was the atmosphere like?
    Prompts – What was your impression of the crowd, (old/young) fans, ethnicity, their political leaning

    5) How would you describe your experience of the rally?
    Prompts – Did anything specific stand out to you?
    E.G. the crowds, music, line-up, JS's speech, lack of political discussion, the rally's overall message, (civility in politics) parts they liked or disliked?

    6) What do you feel was the rally's agenda or message?
    Was it successful in communicating it?

    7) How would you summarise the effectiveness of the rally?

    8) We've had the Rally to Restore Sanity, The Rumble How do you feel about *TDS & Colbert Report* doing these events outside of their respective shows?
    Prompt – do they work? What other things could they do? What about the rumble with Jon Stewart & Bill O'Reilly?

Media Questions

    1) What source of news do you rely on the most?

    Prompt – newspapers, online cable news

    Prompt – <u>Why do you use this one specifically?</u>

    Follow Up Q – What other media do you routinely watch/read or listen to?

    <u>Prompt/follow up what news outlets do you avoid?</u>

    2) What type of news stories are you interested in?

    3) How do you feel about the American **news** media in general?

    Prompt – <u>Cable News</u> positives, negatives, more choice, slanted, online, aggressive

Questions relating to citizenship

    1) What do you think about voting?

    Prompt/follow up Q – is it something worth doing?

    2) What is your attitude towards American politics? (How do you feel about American politics in general?)

    3) What political subjects are important to you?

    Follow up - Do you demonstrate your interest in politics in anyway?

    E.g. community projects, activism, protest, members of a political party, discussing politics with people, following the subject via news and other sources (SNS)

    Prompt/follow up Q – do they practice these things regularly?

    4) How does **<u>cable news</u>** affect your outlook on politics?

    <u>Consider – positive or negative responses</u>

    Prompts – more interested in politics/less interested? What about other forms of news e.g. online, newspapers.

    5) How does *TDS* make you feel about politics?

    Follow up – How does it make you feel about the media?

    Prompt – how does it do this?

    Prompt – What parts of the show make you feel this way?

    Prompt – What parts of the show are less successful in making you feel this way?

Appendix B.

Coding Sheet

1. Publication Code: _____

2. Type of Publication: _____

3. Story before or after the rally? _____

4a. Reason given for participant attendance? _____

4b. Further context given for attendance? _____

5. Media framing of the rally? _____

6. Framing of rally participants?_____

7. Framed in opposition to Glenn Beck Rally

1. Yes	2. No

8. Activist groups mentioned

No Mention
Group e.g. Environmental
Group
Group

9. Detailed analysis of the rally

1. Yes	2. No

10a. Sources featured in text? _____

10b. Opinions expressed towards the purpose of the rally?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

10c. Opinions expressed towards the effectiveness of the rally?

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

10d. Frames relating to the rally's impact

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Comments & Quotes taken from article

Article	Interesting Comments
E.g. FoxNews1	

Appendix C.

Coding Manual

  1. Publication/News Network Code
      Each publication will have its own unique code

  2. Type of Publication
1. Broad Sheet
2. Tabloid Paper
3. Local paper
4. Magazine
5. Journal
6. Talk Show
7. Cable News program
8. Network news (Broadcast)
9. Blog
10. News Wire
11. International News
12. Online news source
13. Radio
14. Media Organization

3. Story before or after the rally?
1. Before – the rally took place
2. After – the rally took place

 4. Reason why audience attended the rally
 4a. (Reasons mentioned)
1. No reason given
2. Intrigued (wanted to see what the rally was about)
3. Fan of the show
4. For a fun day out
5. To campaign for the mid-term election
6. Activism – to raise awareness of single issue politics
7. To support the rally's message – to bring civility into political discourse
8. To demonstrate their frustration with the American political system
9. To demonstrate their frustration with the American media
10. To demonstrate their frustration with the mid-term campaign
11. Because they had never been to a rally before
12. To be around like minded people (who supported the civility message)
13. In support of Obama & the Democrat Party (Mid-term election)

4b. further context given

1. Over arching problem – A mention of the overriding problem or in this instance, the purpose of the rally
2. Diagnose causes – who is to blame for the overriding problem
3. Defining specific problems – the consequent problems resulting from the overarching issue
4. Suggested remedies – offer and justify treatments for the problems
5. No further context given

5. Framing of the rally

1. <u>Politically motivated event</u> e.g. frames that suggested the rally an event organized for political reasons. This included those that framed the rally as an activist event, a call to action to improve America's political dialogue or those that related the event to the mid-term election such as encouraging participants to vote.
2. <u>Hybrid event (pop culture/politically motivated event)</u> e.g. used to indicate media frames that used a combination of political and popular culture terms or phrases to describe the 'Rally to Restore Sanity'.
3. <u>Popular culture event</u> e.g. used when the rally was characterised as a music, comedy, party or festival event.

6. Framing of the rally attendees

1. Fancy dress
2. Activist (references made to activist groups will be asked in a later question)
3. Left-leaning (politically)
4. Right-leaning (politically)
5. Well behaved (calm)
6. Age of the audience (note down the particular age groups that are mentioned)
7. Level of intelligence (college educated)

7. Rally framed in opposition to the Glenn Beck Rally

1. Yes
2. No

8. Activist Groups Mentioned

1. No mention in article
2. Gay rights
3. Environmental
4. Educational
5. Healthcare
6. Marijuana (legalization of)
7. Naral
8. DNC Phone Bank
9. Moveon
10. Anti-war
11. Anti-Tea Party groups
12. Immigration

13. Animal Rights groups
14. Rock the Vote
15. League of Young Voters

9. Detailed media analysis of the rally
1. Yes - 'detailed reporting' has been used to account for articles that provide a comprehensive account of the rally.   This was indicated by those that reported the rally's purpose, interpretation or analysis of what happened at the event, interviews with at lease 2 or more sources, concluding thoughts (by the journalist or sources) or summing up of the effectiveness of the event.
2. No – None of the above were included in the article

10a. Sources featured
   1. Activist
   2. Unaffiliated member of the public
   3. Republican (politician)
   4. Democrat (politician)
   5. Journalist
   6. Unaffiliated pundit
   7. Republican pundit
   8. Democrat pundit
   9 Jon Stewart
   10. Stephen Colbert
   11. Celebrity (actor, singer etc)
   12. Police

10b. Opinion expressed towards the purpose of the rally
   1. Optimistic – discussion is supportive towards the idea that the rally is calling for civility in Political discourse
   2. Pessimistic – oppositional opinions towards the rally e.g. it is not effective, Confusion towards the aims of the rally
   3. Neutral – Ambivalence – conflicting opinions on the rally (positive and negative
   4. No opinion given

10c. Opinions expressed towards the effectiveness of the Rally
   1. <u>Optimistic reactions</u> - which suggested that the rally had successfully promoted its   civility message or those that would help encourage other positive outcomes like bringing like minded citizens together and thus encouraging further political participation. This would include acts such as voting and instigating or taking part in other participatory groups that supported the rally's message after the event had taken place.
   2. <u>Pessimistic reactions</u> those that openly criticised the event.   For example, those that felt that the rally was an ineffective platform to promote the civility message, those that criticised the inclusion of satire and popular culture and those that felt that the event was too similar to the *TDS* programme.
   3. <u>Mixed reactions</u> – account for combined optimistic and pessimistic responses and analytical reactions to the rally which were characterised as those that

questioned its authenticity and whether a hybrid satire/activism event could change the country's political dialogue

10d. Measuring the Rally's Impact

1. Political impact – that the rally had led to forms of political action. This would includes cases where news coverage would continue to highlight the validity of the rally's message and perceptions of the rally as a gateway for further political engagement such as advocating civility in politics. It would also account for cases where *TDS* may have moved beyond the realms of comedy by becoming more heavily involved in political issues like advocacy journalism or politics

2. Success for *TDS* – This frame would account for instances where media coverage identified the rally as an event that led to increased recognition for TDS brand such as increased audience ratings

3. Continued criticisms of the Rally – Frames that continued to criticize the rally because of its central message, confusion in what it was attempting to achieve and/or its inability to change current political communication practices

Appendix D.

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
Cardiff University

Title of Project: Fake news or the Fifth Estate? A study of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and Political Citizenship

Principle Researcher: Allaina Kilby
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1. **Purpose of study:** To explore American citizens relationship with *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, with specific focus on their attendance and participation at the Rally to Restore Sanity.

2. **Procedure to be followed**: For participants to answer a 24 question interview via Skype/telephone.

3. **Duration**: 20 minutes to answer the questions.

4. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research is confidential. The data gathered will be stored and secured on the researchers' external hard drive in a password protected file. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personal identifiable information will be shared.

5. **Right to ask Questions:** Please contact Allaina Kilby via email kilbya1@cardiff.ac.uk with any questions or concerns about this study.

6. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below. If you are younger than 18 you will also need to gain permission from your parent/guardian.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

_____   _____
Participant Signature   Date

_____   _____
Parental/Guardian Signature   Date
(If applicable)

Allaina Kilby_____   14.1.2013_____
Person Obtaining Consent   Date

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