

YouTube and the Public Sphere: What role does YouTube  
play in contributing towards Habermas' notion of the public  
sphere

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## **Abstract:**

The manner in which western audiences consume and engage with news has dramatically changed within the last decade. The introduction of the video sharing platform YouTube in 2005 combined with improving internet speeds, provided a new platform from which a wide variety of content could be easily consumed. Habermas' concept of the public sphere provides a conceptual framework to analyse how YouTube may be contributing towards a healthy democracy. By examining how various aspects of videos on YouTube uploaded to the channels of the news organisations CNN, Fox News, BBC News, Al Jazeera English and The Young Turks, this thesis aims to examine what role YouTube may play in contributing to Habermas' concept of the public sphere.

The study's sample comprises a total of 1239 videos uploaded by the five news organisations over two separate weeks. A mixed methodological approach was taken where a content analysis and an automated sentiment analysis was conducted. The content analysis was used to determine what links if any there were across several of the variable recorded in the data collection. The automated sentiment analysis used the software SentiStrength to determine the levels of positive and negative language used in the titles of the videos. Additionally a number of case studies regarding the types of user comments were discussed in order to explore the potential contribution they could be making towards the public sphere.

The findings of this study were that the topic of the news videos did seem to play a role in the levels of user engagement with the videos. Similarly, the sentiment of the language used in the titles of the videos also had an impact, with negatively sentimented titles generated more user engagement. The exploration of user comments found that they were emblematic of similar trends found in communications research.

The findings in this thesis go some way to answering the extent to which YouTube can be seen as contributing towards Habermas' notion of the public sphere. However, due to the aspect of emotionality that is present in the data analysed, this thesis suggests that due to the ongoing process of media hybridization, a new conceptual framework of the public sphere that acknowledges how both thoughtful discussions as well as ones which express feelings in an overt way needs to be developed.

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## **Introduction:**

The manner in which news has been consumed by the public has shifted over time with the introduction of new technologies. In the age of the internet and online video streaming, this is no more evident than on the platform of YouTube where there are now over 1 billion users, consuming over 1 billion hours of video a day (YouTube, 2018).

Since YouTube's introduction into the media landscape in 2005 where it was home to videos such as trips to the zoo (Kosoff, 2015), it has grown and flourished to become the second most visited website on the internet (Collins, 2018). Over the course of its life so far, the platform has introduced localization, premium subscription services, traditional TV streaming services and a range of other built in features that have contributed towards its dominance in the online video marketplace. With a majority of young people in western societies claiming that their main source of news is from the internet (Caumont, 2013) and 47% of the American public in general seeing news on their social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Pew Research Center, 2012) it is increasingly important to research how news is being presented to this audience on these and other digital platforms.

Early research on YouTube focussed predominantly on how particular areas of culture were being represented (Lowood, 2006) or approaching it as a new technological development (Pence, 2007). However, as the platform has developed in both size and sophistication, scholars have begun to broaden the areas and methods of research on YouTube by drawing upon existing research on other platforms such as TV and print and applying those ideas to the content on YouTube. A key concept that can be used to help understand the role that a platform plays in a society is Habermas' theory of the public sphere (1989). By considering this theory, in conjunction with the concepts of media hybridization proposed by Chadwick (2013) and news values by Harcup & O'Neill (2001) this thesis aims to explore the extent to which YouTube can be said to positively contribute towards a democratic society.

Due to the growing number of people consuming news online and YouTube being the largest online video hosting website with the ability for instant audience interaction it is important to consider, through the concept of media hybridization how news organisations have adapted to this platform due to the constantly evolving relationships between older and news media logics (Chadwick, Dennis & Smith, 2016: 10). Media logics are to be understood as a process through which organizations institutionalize their guidelines to such an extent that they become “taken for granted and serve as interpretive schema” (Tsurriel et al, 2019: 2). In using this concept, one can also look at whether due to the different features of the platform whether different news values such as those proposed by Harcup & O’Neill (2001), McGregor (2002) or Shoemaker et al (1991) can be seen to be being elevated by the news organisations in this study.

To generate understanding across these areas, this research intends to collect data on various metrics of YouTube videos posted on the YouTube channels of news organisations.

To accomplish this goal, a sample of 1239 videos was sourced from 5 news organisations that had a large presence on YouTube. The five organisations that were chosen for the sample were Fox News, CNN, BBC News, Al Jazeera English and The Young Turks. The rationale for selecting these organisations stems from several reasons. Firstly, combined, each of these networks represent a range of the types of online news video content that western audiences may be subjected to. Four of the networks are well established organisations that despite having a more western focus of their news coverage, are nonetheless international news brands. The Young Turks however is a relatively new, solely YouTube based news network. Due to the structural differences and lack of traditional restraints which will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6, TYT is an important inclusion in this research as it will provide a direct comparison between old media logics that have arisen from the platform of television as well new media logics that may have developed from digitally native organisations like TYT.

Many of the elements recorded for each video were simple in nature, such as the raw number of views a video had received or the length of the video. However, others such as the topic being discussed or the format of the discussion required the development of a coding guide to ensure that the sample was recorded as accurately as possible. Given one of the requirements of content analysis is its need for reliability (Krippendorff, 1986; Weber, 1990b) a second coder was used to ensure the coding framework that was deployed had a reasonably high level of reliability so that the validity of the arguments made in the study would be strengthened

One of the metrics which this study wanted to pay particular attention to was the titles of the YouTube videos and extent to which the language used in them influenced the levels of user engagement. To explore this idea, all 1239 videos in the sample were put through the software SentiStrength which analysed each title and gave it a sentiment score based on the positive and negative language used. Whilst analysing or measuring language in a numerical way is nothing new (Schofield, 1995), such a manner of analysis attempts to limit the amount of subjective interpretation required by the researcher. This does not lead to a completely unbiased analysis of the data due to the inherent biases that are programmed into all sentiment analysis systems (Kiritchenko & Mohammad, 2018). Despite this caveat, using such a computational tool should generate as unbiased interpretation of the data set as is possible, beyond running the data through multiple sentiment analysis tools to try and minimize the bias programmed into each piece of software. The use of SentiStrength should produce a unique insight into the overall positivity or negativity of the language used on the video titles.

Scholars agree that journalism is a key component in the thriving of any democracy (Franklin, 2004; Hackett, 2005; Schudson, 2008) and as such, it is important to investigate new areas where journalism is being produced and consumed. By engaging with the concept of the public sphere, this research aims to explore how YouTube potentially contributes to a democratic society.

The key findings in this research can be summarised in two separate areas, content and user engagement. The findings around the nature of news content on YouTube show that much like other traditional media platforms, YouTube appears to be similar in terms of range of topics presented as well as the manner in which they are framed, namely in a negative way. The greater use of negative framing alongside the prevalence of stories pertaining to crime, reinforces existing research by the likes of Vettehen et al (2005) and Gans (2004) that not only is news becoming more sensationalised through the use of language to frame stories, but also research by Tenenboim & Cohen (2013) and Stroud et al (2016), that stories which can be sensationalized are covered more often. The findings pertaining to user engagement detail how factors such as a news stories topic as well as the manner in which it is framed, have some impact on the amount of user engagement a news video on YouTube receives. This is evidenced by videos pertaining to the topic of terrorism receiving the most amount of user engagement. Another finding within the area of user engagement was that news videos that used a round table discussion format were on average the most engaged with by users. This finding lends support to the theory of parasocial interactions between audiences and on screen personas (Horton & Wohl, 1956) in that a more conversational style of presenting the news encourages audiences to join in with that conversation.

The key contribution the findings from this research make is towards the ongoing discussion within academic discourse around whether Habermas' original conception of the public sphere may no longer be an appropriate framework in evaluating the democratizing effects of a public space. By considering the increasing value that the role of emotions has in journalism (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019) alongside trends of audiences being drawn to negatively framed stories (Trussler & Soroka, 2014) leading to more negatively framed content on YouTube, this study seeks to make the case that future studies in this area should seek a conceptual framework where an emphasis is placed on the value of contextualisation and emotional engagement rather than relying upon Habermas' criteria of rationality in determining the value of a public space. The consequence of this in practical terms is that future research and discussions should

force newsrooms to question their existing media logics and re-evaluate the ways in which their journalism can best serve the public and the democratic society they exist in.

### **Structure and approach to the research:**

The structure of this research will be split into 8 distinct chapters each dealing with a specific overarching idea or particular aspects of the analysed data.

The first chapter of this thesis aims to explore Habermas' concept of the public sphere, the limitations and criticisms of the theory and how aspects of it can be linked to some of the existing academic work surrounding the broad concepts of the core roles of journalism, the notions of objectivity and bias, as well as the distinction between hard and soft news. These areas of communications research will then be grounded in a discussion around the concept of news values, first exploring Galtung & Ruge's initially proposed model (1965), before moving on to a more contemporary model such as Harcup & O'Neill's (2001). From here, the concept of audience attention will be discussed and linked to the aforementioned news values. The purpose of discussing these issues in the context of this research is that it is important to show how well established norms within journalism studies are just as relevant to the platform of YouTube as they are to more traditional forms of news media. On top of this, highlighting the types of news content that exists and how they can be defined plays a crucial role in helping to understand later discussions about how various news topics are presented on YouTube. Finally, by raising the notions of objectivity and the roles of journalism, this chapter aims to situate the role that news videos on YouTube can play in maintaining a well-informed public sphere.

Chapter 2 focuses around the topic of emotions, namely the debates around whether they exist in journalism and if they do, should they and what functions do they play in the journalistic process? The chapter will also explore the concept of framing and how emotions through the employment of language with particular news frames have the potential to impact an audience's perception of a news story. The reason why particular

attention is given to the concept of framing in this chapter is due in part to the widespread agreement amongst researchers that media frames exert at least some influence over audiences (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007) and hence, the public sphere.

Chapter 3 is the final literature review chapter which will begin by outlining trends in news consumption before then discussing Chadwick's (2013) concept of media hybridization along with Jenkins (2004) concept of media convergence. Given the context provided by the explanation of news consumption trends, the use of these two concepts will help situate the context of this research, by enabling a more theoretically grounded discussion around YouTube's role and impact in the current media ecosystem. Part of its role will be explored through one of the platform's unique features, that being the ability for users to directly interact with the content they are consuming in the form of user comments. The final part of this literature review chapter will look at existing academic work that has been conducted on American cable news media, particularly with reference to the concept of media bias. The purpose of this discussion is to situate the rationale provided in the methodology as to why the particular news organisations were chosen for this study.

The methodology of this study will be detailed in chapter 4. The chapter will begin by presenting the three main research questions for this study. This will be followed by a rationale as to why a mixed methods approach, using both content analysis and sentiment analysis was deemed the most effective means of answering the proposed research questions. A content analysis was used in order to determine what variables on YouTube news videos may impact the different types of user engagement found on YouTube. A sentiment analysis was conducted on the titles of each of the videos in the data sample to help explore the role that emotion plays in the user engagement with news videos on YouTube. Finally, an explanation will be provided as to how and why case studies of user comments will be used to help consider whether or not such comments accurately reflect Habermas's notion of the public sphere.

The analysis of the data gathered will be presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7. The analysis conducted in chapter 5 will focus on the larger trends found across the entire data set by looking for trends between the variables collected. If trends are able to be established, this would demonstrate that as a news platform, YouTube may share many of the similar trends that are seen across other news mediums such as particular topics being covered more than others, or certain topics generate more user engagement than others.

Chapter 6 will narrow the scope of the analysis to look at the trends and patterns found within each of the individual network's videos. This will be done by drawing upon the notion of branding and the already established characteristics of networks, some of which are highlighted in chapter 3. The purpose of this analysis is twofold. Firstly by analysing each networks separately, the ability to establish whether digitally native news organisations such as The Young Turks may exhibit different news values to established news organisations like CNN. Secondly, by being able to identify trends and characteristics within each network, one hopes to generate new discussions around what news networks can be doing on YouTube to help the public sphere.

The final analysis chapter, chapter 7, further narrows the scope of discussion by shifting towards a more qualitative approach to user engagement, by looking in greater detail at a handful of particular videos, with special attention being paid towards the user comments that have been written on them. This will be done to provide greater insight towards how the public react to news on YouTube. With much scholarly work already being done on how the public utilises social media platforms and native news websites to comments on news stories, this chapter aims to look at the type of comments being left on YouTube videos. This will be done with consideration with the ideas of the impact these comments have as well as if the types of comments being left can be deemed as successful regarding their positive contribution to the public sphere.

Finally, chapter 8 will summarise the findings presented in the previous chapters and attempt to directly address all three of the proposed research questions in this study.

These discussions will be used to acknowledge the potency of some of the theories laid out within the literature review chapters of this study. In doing so the chapter aims to contextualise how YouTube's role in a democratic society can be perceived and thus, whether the platform contributes towards Habermas' notion of the public sphere or whether a reformulation of this concept is required. This chapter will also acknowledge some of the limitations of this study by recognising both it's practical limitations as well as some of the underlying assumptions that have been made during its discussions.



## **CHAPTER 1: The public sphere and the role of journalism**

Throughout this chapter the concepts of objectivity, bias, ethics, news values and hard and soft news are explored in relation to how they function and interact within the theory of the public sphere. All of these concepts and their associated ideas have informed how previous academic exploration of the public sphere has been pursued. In order to understand and evaluate the public sphere, it is crucial for these other concepts to be understood as well. By discussing these concepts in conjunction with one another, not only should this chapter show how each concept compliments each other but also provide a contextual framework within which YouTube can be viewed as a news platform and ergo, the extent to which YouTube can contribute towards the public sphere like more traditional news platforms are perceived to do.

### **1.1: The public sphere**

At the core of this study is the concept of the role that YouTube plays within a democratic society. Any discussion focused on the intersection between citizenship and the media will be heavily influenced by the works of Habermas and his concept of the public sphere. Habermas first saw the emergence of the public sphere in the coffee houses of the 18th century Europe (1989: 31). According to Habermas the existence of these places were only able to come about due to legal or constitutional frameworks present in the state such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly (1989: 83). As such, he conceptualizes 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.” (1964: 49)

This concept is important within the field of journalism studies as, as Wahl-Jorgensen (2007) and Dahlgreen (2009) point out, it highlights how central a role the news media plays within a democratic society.

The public sphere as Habermas initially conceived it was egalitarian in nature in that as noted in the quote from Habermas above, one of the key aspects of the public sphere is its exclusivity to all citizens. By having everyone being able to contribute towards the debate, “participants are transformed from self-seeking private individuals to a public spirited collectivity, capable of acting together in the common interest” (Fraser, 1992: 137). This idealised version of the public sphere is not something that lasted however. Those who enabled the debate in the coffee houses, namely the publishers of news literature at the time, began to become less concerned with what was in the public interest and instead shifted focus towards what interested the public. Habermas notes this degeneration of the public sphere stems from the rise of commercialisation within the news industry. (1989: 184). The creeping commercialisation of the news media had a number of effects on the content being produced, such as the trivialisation of news content (Franklin, 1997), as well as the way in which the public began to no longer be treated as active citizens, but rather as passive consumers (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1997; Street 2001). These two changes are central to the argument in this study that YouTube as a platform helps facilitate the public sphere.

Even before the influence of commercial interests began to impact the public sphere, there were still problems and limitations with how Habermas conceptualized it. During the 18th Century, the coffee houses in which the public sphere resided were not in fact egalitarian. There were barriers to entry along class lines (Baker, 1990) and gender (Elshtain, 1981). Given that the opinions of the lower classes as well as women were excluded, Habermas failed to consider how alternative public spheres may have formed. Fraser (1990: 61) notes that despite women being prohibited from partaking in the dominant public sphere, they were still able to create routes into public and political life, thereby suggesting the existence of alternative venues of public discussion.

One way to understand how multiple public spheres can exist is to consider the concept of the global public sphere through the use of Castells' networked society. The notion of a public sphere wherein all citizens of the world are able to partake has largely grown out of the development of technology, most notably the internet. Manuel Castells (1996) proposed the notion of a networked society wherein different societies were networked through social, political and economic relationships. This globalized communication network brings with it the idea that there could be a global public sphere where the citizenry of the world could "behave as a public body...and publish their opinions about matters of general interest." (Habermas, 1964: 49). Castells has argued that a global public sphere should emerge from the existence of a "global civil society...and ad hoc forms of global governance enacted by international, conational, and supranational political institutions" (2008: 80). However, given his acknowledgement that "Not everything or everyone is globalized" (2008: 81), in that not everyone has access to the internet and the existence of language and cultural barriers, perhaps one can only argue that the concept of a global public sphere is limited to a utopian ideal and that the best that new communication technologies can offer is a contribution to the "formation of 'cross-border publics spheres' that bypass central authority" (Stephansen, 2019: 347). Regardless of how one defines a global public sphere, within these larger networks exist what Volkmer calls nodes that "are situated within a universe of subjective, personal networked structures linking individuals across world regions." (2014: 1) and it is these smaller networks that people are engaging with. This means that whether we live in an idealized global public sphere or a world of multiple 'cross-border publics spheres' that through their interaction with one another comes to constitute a global public sphere (Sassen, 2006: 366), many of the issues that faced Habermas' original concept still apply to today's technologically influenced public sphere.

One of the components of Habermas' public sphere was the requirement of rational discussion in order to lead to sensible decision making. As Kilby points out, citing the works of Dahlgreen (2009) and Wahl-Jorgensen (2007), "By over-emphasising the importance of rationality, Habermas ignores emotive and passionate forms of participation, action or rhetoric" (2014: 23). The role that emotion plays within the news

media specifically its role and impact, will be explored more later in this paper, however its relationship to the concept of the public will be further discussed here.

As outlined above the evolution of communication technology has influenced the way the public's engagement with news media is conceptualised. As well as allowing the potential for a global public sphere, technology, specifically social media, has enabled the emergence of what Schimdt (2014) calls 'personal publics'. These personalized networks enable citizens to select what civic debates they wish to engage with and which they would rather ignore. The ability to choose what civic discussion they partake in is linked to the role of emotion in the public sphere in two ways. The first is based on the idea that the presence of emotion is necessary for civic engagement as without it people would lack the motivation to act upon what is being discussed. Multiple scholars such as Gamson (1992), Eyerman (2005) and Flam & King (2005) have contended that emotions play an important role in social movements. The personalised networks that an individual chooses to engage with are likely influenced by what emotions the discussions within that network elicit. This notion that people will engage with news content that elicits emotion is something that will be explained in greater detail later, however, it is this notion that leads onto the second way in which the role of emotion impacts the public sphere.

As stated earlier, Habermas felt that part of the degradation on the public sphere stemmed from the entrance of commercial forces which led to the trivialisation of news content. The trivialisation of news content has been described in various forms by scholars such as 'McJournalism' by Franklin (2003) or 'Newszak' by Hallin (1999), or more commonly used terms such as 'Infotainment' or 'Tabloidization'. All these terms in some form relate to how stories in the news are dramatized in some way, making them more sensational and entertaining (Galtung & Ruge 1965). This dumbing down of content has a negative impact on the public sphere because a public without sufficient information cannot make informed decisions about how their society is run (Barber, 1999: 582). Habermas himself noted that reporting on politically important news is in decline due in part to an industry disposition towards more entertaining news topics

(1989: 170). This in turn links back to the role of rational debate in the public sphere as the news media thus “has a tendency to present a substitute more palatable for consumption and more likely to give rise to an impersonal indulgence in stimulating relaxation than to a public use of reason.” (Ibid). The degradation of the public sphere through the dumbing down of content is supported by Slevin (2000) who adds that contemporary media systems are increasingly more commercialized and hence producing even more sensationalized news content. However, given that emotions play an important role in social mobilizations (Gamson, 1992; Eyerman, 2005; Flam & King, 2005), the presence of emotion should not be seen as a wholly negative one.

Before turning towards more broader issues with the role that journalism plays, one must still consider more contemporary factors that contribute towards the degradation of the public sphere. One of these is the increased commodification of the public sphere through both an increased role of advertising (Franklin, 2008) and the use of paywalls for digital news media (McQuail, 2010: 222). In order to survive, news media requires a large audience which it can sell as a commodity to advertisers. Due to this, Habermas sees advertising as a factor in the degradation of the public sphere because the introduction of both private and commercial interests into the public sphere, turns the forum for public debate into one where profit is given priority over the substance of the debate (Habermas, 1989: 189-193). The expansion of digital technology within the newsroom has also arguably contributed towards the degradation of the public sphere. The 24/7 news routine and the emergence of additional platforms for news content has led to greater pressures on journalists, which in turn have been partly blamed for some of the excesses of the press (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013: 140-142). With journalists having to produce more content, across multiple platforms with greater time constraints, this has led to more infotainment which is easier to produce and as noted earlier, is damaging towards the public sphere (Graber, 1994).

The discussions above lead towards a more direct question around what should the criteria be for determining whether an online space such as YouTube can be considered

a public sphere? One approach to answering this question would be to apply Habermas' original conception of what the public sphere should be.

Arguably one of Habermas' criteria is that "access is guaranteed to all citizens." (1964: 49). As has already been discussed, under his original conception of the public sphere, the coffee houses of 18<sup>th</sup> Century England, the notion of egalitarianism was found lacking. However when it comes to online spaces, there is a case to be made that this criteria is met due to the now widespread adoption and use of internet technologies by most of the world. Despite the proliferation of the internet however, there are in fact new and different barriers that prevent it from meeting Habermas' guaranteed access criteria. The first of these is that whilst the internet is widely available, this availability is largely skewed in favour of Western societies (Friemel, 2016). Although this would temper any case made for the concept of a global public sphere, it would still allow for national or localized public spheres. This then leads to another consideration to be made regarding the issue of access, namely technological literacy. Even if it were the case that everyone within a particular society had access to an online public sphere, some within that society may not have the skills required to properly engage within that sphere. As has been well documented (Demunter, 2005; Katz & Rice, 2002; Wei & Hindman, 2011), there is a "grey divide" where older members of society are less likely to be able to engage with certain aspects of society that have been moved online. This is then yet further evidence that the criteria of a public sphere having guaranteed access is one that online platforms such as YouTube do not meet.

Another criteria one could consider for whether an online platform is part of the public sphere is whether it is free of commercial and political pressures. Digital spaces are susceptible to the same forces that Habermas saw as corrupting the original public spheres (Carey, 1995). When it comes to a platform such as YouTube, it is almost impossible to disassociate it from commercial pressures, despite it being viewed as an almost monopoly when it comes to online video distribution (Lindvall, 2014; Cable, 2018). As has been previously mentioned, it is the pressures from advertising that are seen as being a degrading force upon a public sphere and advertising plays a large role

in the functioning of the platform. Due to this it could be argued that that YouTube fails to meet this second criteria. However, the presence of advertising on a platform like YouTube is slightly more complex than when Habermas was considering advertising's role in newspapers. Members of the public who choose to upload content onto YouTube can choose whether to monetize their videos or not. If they choose not to, then it is unlikely that the content they produce is going to be influenced directly by commercial pressures. On the other hand though, it can still be argued that commercial pressures are at play on the platform as regardless of whether an individual user monetizes their content, if advertisers are unhappy with that content, they could still threaten YouTube as a whole and ask for the content to be removed otherwise they would withdraw their adverts from other videos on the platform. An example of this is what has been called the 'Adpocalypse' where among algorithmic changes, several high-profile scandals on the platform caused advertisers to temporarily withdraw spending, forcing content creators to adapt to a new algorithmic paradigm (Bishop, 2020). When it comes to political pressures it can be argued that online platforms face a wider array than traditional spaces. Whereas a coffee house or newspaper may be pressured by the government and legislation in their country of origin, platforms like YouTube are subject to global scrutiny and thereby pressure from potentially multiple governments, all wanting to regulate the platform in different ways (Wakabayashi & Goldmacher, 2019; Bergen, 2020; Slefo, 2020)

The ideal of freedom of expression as a necessary component of any public sphere (Habermas, 1964) is also called into question when considering the platform of YouTube. The limiting of expression takes several forms on the platform, ranging from harmful and hateful content being taken down by YouTube itself, to channels of official political accounts such as the White House being able to block users from commenting on any videos on the channel. These limitations however, should not be seen as diminishing the possibility of a public sphere being realized on online platforms such as YouTube. This is largely because the criteria of freedom of expression comes into conflict with the criteria of requiring rational debate. As has already been discussed, a strict adherence to rationality that leaves no room for emotions subsequently ignores an

important aspect of the point of public discourse where “anarchy, individuality, and disagreement, rather than rational accord, lead to true democratic emancipation.” (Lyotard, 1984 cited in Papacharissi, 2002: 11). As will be explored in later chapters, online discourse has the ability to express toxic and harmful discourses (Massanari, 2015; Jones, Trott & Wright, 2019) and that because of this capability, a balance must be struck between allowing freedom of expression and maintaining a certain level of civil discourse.

A final criteria to consider when evaluating online platforms as potential public spheres is whether these online spaces have the ability to influence and affect change in the public’s views and actions. Early scholars considering this issue were somewhat hesitant to see these new digital spaces as being able to translate talk into action. As Breslow (1997) put it “How should I know who is at the other end, and when the chips are down, will people actually strip off their electronic guises to stand and be counted?” (Cited in Papacharissi, 2002: 22). However, as adoption and adaptation of these digital spaces has grown, scholars now see that engagement with these digital spaces does lead both to changes in public discourse (Kenix, 2008; Hestres, 2014; Mina, 2014) as well as democratic action (Morozov, 2009; Dennis, 2016). Examples of YouTube videos impacting society range from the mainstreaming of K-Pop in Western society through Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’ music video (Jin & Yoon, 2016), to raising awareness of societal issues such as LGBT or disability rights with Obama’s ‘It gets better’ video and the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge videos (Gal, Shifman & Kampf, 2016), as well as helping cause direct political action during the Arab Spring (Khamis, Gold & Vaughn, 2012).

Returning to the question of what criteria should be used to determine whether an online platform can be considered an online public sphere, it would appear that if one were to use Habermas’s original conception of what one should do, then platforms like YouTube fail to meet a number of these criteria. However, the expectations that one should have for platforms like YouTube should arguably be the same expectations we hold for other traditional platforms like television or newspapers. Given the issues raised with Habermas’ conception of the public sphere such as whether it is merely an ideal



that has never really existed (Dahlgren, 1995; Schudson, 1992) in any form, or if Habermas was simply writing about the concept in a historical context (Dahlgren, 1995), one should then look towards considering the news media as a concept, as it is through the news media that any public sphere's existence relies on.

## **1.2: Core concepts of news**

One way to understand the core of the concepts of news, is by looking at the ideology of news. The role that the notion of ideology has played in communication studies has shifted over time, first being dominated by critical Marxists who defined the term as “a body of ideas which are alleged to be erroneous and divorced from the practical realities of political life” (Thompson, 1990: 32). The political underpinning of the notion of ideology that critical Marxists pushed was challenged in the 1960s by Daniel Bell's book ‘The End of Ideology’ (1960). This book did not end the focus of academic study of ideology within communication studies but instead generated new perspectives on the issue such as the superstructural approach proposed by Louis Althusser. Sjøvaag (2010) explains Althusser's superstructure level of society theory as one that “consists of two kinds of state apparatus – where one is the Repressive State Apparatus that controls society through violence or the threat of violence, and the other is the Ideological State Apparatus that expresses the ruling ideology.” (2010: 875). Althusser places the media in the ideological state apparatus category as it feeds the public ideas regarding what it should be thinking about and how. By being subject to this apparatus, every action that a person takes becomes inherently ideological in that “either we follow the rules and are left in peace as our behaviours reproduce the dominant order, or we break the rules and suffer the consequences imposed by the Repressive State Apparatuses – the police and the law – in order to correct our behaviours” (ibid: 876). This is an important concept as whilst “ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 1971:153) , because ideology and reality do not resemble one another this means that “there is no ideology except by the subject and for the subject” (ibid: 160). This therefore entails that all ideology, in the case of this research the ideology of journalists, originates from the journalists themselves.

How these ideologies get promoted and promulgated is explained by Stuart Hall through the notion of media institutions which over time came to be viewed as things that help construct meaning. The media, according to Hall, were favourable to dominant groups as it made certain things appear as natural and immutable, thereby limiting the range of acceptable perceptions of reality. (Hall, 1982). The power then, to determine what topics or issues are settled, which are controversial and which are deemed beyond the bounds of discussion, lies not in relation to class or politics but by being able to dominate through holding positions of leadership within media institutions. If those within these positions of leadership can make these determinations about ideology, then the next step to take would be to look at what elements and factors have been promoted to make up the ideology of journalism.

According to Deuze (2006), ideology can be seen as an intellectual process over time which shapes the views and values of a group of people. The purpose of journalism as a profession having an ideology argues Deuze, is to legitimize it, and therein the journalists themselves, position in society as well as to help defend against criticisms, both internally and externally of the profession.

The elements that make up the journalistic ideology according to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) can be broken down into five parts, those being objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, ethics and public benefit. Whilst this last element is arguably the most important when discussing the notion of journalism democratizing role, the other elements should also be discussed due to their fundamental nature.

Objectivity has been identified by both academics (Reese, 1990) and journalists (Judis, 2013) alike as being something without which journalism would not exist. Whilst pure objectivity is something that may not be attainable, the degree to which it can be will be discussed later, it is something to which journalists can aim towards. Some journalists however argue pure objectivity is not possible as we perceive and process the world through subjective prisms (Greenwald, 2013) and hence should not be something that is

pursued to the detriment of the other elements of journalistic ideology. Understanding objectivity is an important aspect for any academic study of journalism, especially ones where the use of language is a concern

The very idea of objectivity and journalism being intertwined can be seen in the origins of journalism and its practitioners aim “to differentiate their ‘truth-seeking’ practices from the ‘truth-distorting’ practices of publicity agents” (Carpentier. N & Trioen. M, 2010: 313). One commonly accepted definition of the term is provided by Schudson (2001: 150) in which he states that:

The objectivity norm guides journalists to separate facts from values and to report only the facts. Objective reporting is supposed to be cool, rather than emotional, in tone. Objective reporting takes pains to represent fairly each leading side in a political controversy. According to the objectivity norm, the journalist’s job consists of reporting something called ‘news’ without commenting on it, slanting it, or shaping its formulation in any way.

Whilst this definition can be seen as one that can be used by both practitioners and academics alike when dealing with the term, it does fall under heavy criticism due to the definition's assumptions. The main assumption that Schudson's definition makes is that there is an objective reality that exists and that knowledge, more importantly, unbiased knowledge of that reality is even possible (Hackett R, 1984). Carpentier & Trioen (2010) outline two arguments that are used by critics of what can be called the traditionalist definition of objectivity. The first is that reality cannot be broken down into a simple list of facts. The second is that all journalists by their very nature, interpret the world by converting it into news. The conclusion that can be garnered by these two points is that the traditional view of objective journalism being the “impersonal gathering and reporting of information’ (Fox and Park, 2006: 38), cannot be accepted. Carpentier & Trioen also note that this conclusion is often followed by a less obvious, yet still commonly argued for conclusion in that there is a call for the jettisoning of the idea of objectivity as something that is both attainable and as something to be pursued. Whilst these are

legitimate criticisms in their own right, they conceptualise the notion of objectivity as an absolute standard which fundamentally fails to see the separation between the “conditions of possibility of the objectivity norm within journalistic ideology on the one hand, and a more concrete exploration of objectivity as embedded in journalistic practices on the other.” (Carpentier & Trioen, 2010: 314). This argument for separation can be summed up by saying that the notion of objectivity should be regarded in two different ways. The first is as “a theoretical imperative underpinning reporting” and the second as a “strategic ritual enabling the defence of the practice as a profession” (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2003: 216).

The importance of objectivity is often stressed by both academics and practitioners as being the most important of the elements that constitute journalism. Since objectivity is the one pervasive element that has allowed objective journalism to be used as a synonym for good journalism (Rogers, 2013), it should be seen as a more important. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 112) say, it is a nodal point, one which holds a special role as it acts as a stabilizer, in that it stabilizes the meaning of the concept in any given context. With objectivity being arguably the key signifier in terms of what makes good journalism in theory, can this be transferred across to when one is considering journalism as a practice? Despite the ubiquitous nature of the 'objectivity norm', it cannot be “disconnected from the particular journalistic practices that together constitute its meaning within journalism.” (Carpentier & Trioen, 2010: 316). What this means is that the definition we give objectivity within the field of journalism is established within a context through a distinct articulation whilst at the same time requiring it to be translated into normal working journalistic practices which also help determine its definition.

The aim of objectivity as an ideological construct is to manage the way in which specific journalistic practices can be used to support the “claim of objectivity” (Tumber & Prentoulis, 2003: 216) and help place said practices into the categories of good and bad in relation to journalism. A problem arises here in that because giving an account is fundamental to capturing reality but never relates to the 'real', it is impossible for the ideological construct to entirely grasp these practices. There is also a further problem to

be noted which stems from the idea that there is a tension between the concept of objectivity and the concrete realizations in journalistic practice. The problem as outlined by Carpentier & Trioen is that whilst the practice of journalism requires the existence of complete objectivity as it provides journalists an identity with which there is a level of coherence that can be used as a frame of reference, the actual meaning of objectivity doesn't correspond with said practices. This problem means that every practice in the field of journalism is flawed as it automatically fails in its claim to reach objectivity and therefore, all journalists are left to deal with the problem of what they “want to do on the one side and what they actually do on the other.” (2010: 317).

According to Carpentier and Trioen then, the notion of objectivity whilst being useful when used in theoretical discussion, when it is used when dealing with the practicalities of journalism is something that is not achievable. However, before linking how this unachievable goal has potential ramifications for the democratizing power of journalism, one can still look at other important concepts that surround the notion of objectivity as these can help explain the perceived role that journalism has in society.

### **1.3: Defining objectivity**

One of these important concepts is that of detachment. Walter Lippmann wrote that “to become detached from one's passions and to understand them consciously, is to render them disinterested. A disinterested mind is harmonious with itself and with reality.” (Lippmann, 1982: 220). What is being alluded to here is the idea that a journalist is more likely to report on reality, that is to say the facts that have occurred, if they emotionally distance themselves from the story that they are reporting on. If one works under the assumption that there is a reality with objective 'facts' that we can learn, then what Lippmann is trying to argue for is that journalists as individuals must be aware of the filtering process that goes on as they try to perceive the world. Cultural norms, preconceptions, education and peer opinion all shape the way we perceive the world by adding filters to the objective reality we are in. An example used by Taflinger (1996) would be of several witnesses of a car crash. Whilst all the witnesses see the same

objective event, each person filters the information in a different way. A chauvinist may blame the crash on the female driver, a religious person may see the will of God at work by preventing any deaths from the crash and an environmentalist will see the event as a case for reducing the number of cars on the road. Each individual interprets the reality of the event differently due to their own individual traits. Stephen Ward makes the point that all forms of journalism require “some degree of interpretation” and that “evaluation haunts even our basic attempts to report an event” (1991: 3). The notion that journalists should try their best to remain as detached as possible is arguably being challenged by the emergence of social media. Two cases of evidence from this come from what younger people say about the issue and also what content is becoming successful in terms of viewing figures. For the latter case and example of this comes from Channel 4 news presenter Jon Snow gave a heartfelt monologue regarding suffering that the children of Gaza were undergoing. The video became a YouTube hit and whilst there was criticism of the perceived one sided bias (Beckett, 2014). This idea of more emotional storytelling is something that will be discussed in the following chapter. The second case of evidence comes from a study by Marchi (2012) which examines the behaviours and attitudes of teenagers towards the news. Marchi found that teens tended to be “skeptical of official news” (2012, 257) gravitated towards more opinionated current affairs TV shows because of the perceived more substantive discussion that is had on them. The challenges that new media platforms present to the notion of objectivity will be presented in greater detail later in the research. However, in relation to the idea that those that are constructing news stories must, according to traditional concepts of what is considered ideologically pure journalism, filter their emotional response to events so as be as objective as possible. This then leads to the question of if we are all burdened with this process of filtering reality, how can anyone let alone journalists be objective?

To answer that question, one should consider the other concepts that surround objectivity. Mindich (1998) offers five key concepts to define objectivity. One of them as mentioned above is detachment with the others being balance, non-partisanship, facticity and an inverted pyramid style of writing.

When discussing the term balance in relation to journalism it is often seen as a virtue. On a rudimentary definition, balance is simply giving all sides to a story equal weight. This however is a fundamentally dishonest way of thinking about balance in terms of journalism. A common example given is that of climate change reporting, in which one may say that under a rudimentary definition of balance, that so long as both sides have had equal say in a discussion, that the report or TV segment has been balanced. This is not the case due to the fact that on one side of the climate change debate there are 97% of experts and the other side only has 3% (Doran & Zimmerman, 2009). To try and say that a report that gives both sides equal credence is balanced, is fundamentally wrong. Kovatch and Rosenstiel (2001: 77) back up this point when they say that:

If an overwhelming percentage of scientists, as an example, believe that global warming is a scientific fact, or that some medical treatment is clearly the safest, it is a disservice to citizens and truthfulness to create the impression that the scientific debate is equally split. Unfortunately, all too often journalistic balance is misconstrued to have this kind of almost mathematical meaning, as if a good story is one that has an equal number of quotes from two sides. As journalists know, often there are more than two sides to a story. And sometimes balancing them equally is not a true reflection of reality.

Two key points can be taken away from this quote. The first is that balance is not an impossibility. So long as a journalist or producer is aware of the context of the story, then some sense of balance in reporting it can be achieved. The second is that a misplaced sense of balance in a journalist's mind can be a "disservice to citizens". This point highlights the need to understand the concept of objectivity in any study concerning journalism and democratization as what constitutes as objective reporting is fundamental to how a society is informed about the world.

One of the other key concepts of objectivity as defined by Mindich is non-partisanship. The term non-partisanship, also known as impartiality is used in the field of journalism to distinguish between those who may report with a bias either in favour or against a certain group or cause. This is important in terms of objectivity as a partisan journalist will likely when reporting on the topic to which they are partisan, report a biased account of the facts. One of the ways which this bias can manifest itself is through the language that is used. What is meant by this is that certain words are connotative and as connotations are not fixed in their definition, their use often presents a problem when it comes to describing events accurately. An example to illustrate this point is provided by Boudana, in which the use of the word 'carnage' when describing the aftermath of a tsunami does not necessarily have a fixed definition. In a report, a journalist may have provided factual points such as the number of houses destroyed or the number of people killed, but by using the word 'carnage' to describe these factual points they have implicitly given a definition to the readers as to what 'carnage' means (Boudana, 2011). A contemporary example of this is highlighted by Sampaio-Dias & Dennis (2017), in which the coverage of the UK 2017 election by BuzzFeed used a “particular digital vernacular to connect with its audience” through the use of memes, animal pictures and other forms of humour. With humour being a subjective thing, the fact it was being used to good effect by a news website to engage with the audience, once again indicates that new, non-traditional or established news organisations are eschewing previously rigorously held notions of non-partisanship and thereby objectivity.

One of the aims of this chapter was to outline the ideas that surround the notion of whether or not the concept of objectivity is achievable. From the debates mentioned, a case can be made that any sense of pure objective reporting by which is meant reporting that is bereft of bias, achieves perfect balance in use of sources and so on from the five elements outlined by Mindich, is not attainable in any practical sense. Whilst Laclau himself thinks that there are “limits of objectivity” (Marchart. O, 2012: 314) as noted earlier, objectivity is still a useful idea to hold onto even if it only serves a purpose in theoretical discussion.



#### **1.4: The roles of journalism and the public sphere**

Habermas' public sphere, as discussed earlier, plays a vital role in having a healthy democratic society. How then, does journalism help contribute towards the public sphere? An answer to this could be through what McNair (2011) calls the minimal functions of the media which are, to inform citizens of events occurring in the world, to educate them as to the meaning and significance of those events, to provide a platform for ideas to be discussed and to act as a watchdog over governments and political institutions. If the media can be seen to be conducting each of these functions then it can be said to be contributing towards the public sphere and hence, helping society.

These minimal functions are similar to those of Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) who suggest that there are several functions which they believe to be critical to purpose of journalism. At arguably its most basic level, journalists are to act as witness bearers for events that are currently or have just happened. With it being impossible for a journalist to be on every street corner in the world, journalists must identify and prioritize those things which are crucial for the perpetuation of society.

A second role of journalism is that of empowerment. The term empowerment can be taken in two ways here, the first is that journalism empowers people as it disseminates knowledge and knowledge empowers people to make better informed decisions. The second way is empowerment through enabling people to take part in process and dialogue of society via citizen journalism (Berger, 2011). As just stated, by disseminating information to the public, journalists empower the public to make better informed decisions and this links back to the ideology of journalism in which an element of it was to benefit the public. Kovach and Rosenstiel point out the empowerment flows in both directions as the public can help inform journalists and act as sources of information, which the journalists can then disseminate to other members of the public.

Another role of journalism is to act as a forum in a society by allowing members of the public to voice their view and opinions. By wanting to stimulate informed debate, it is a germane step to want to help organise and provide a platform or medium through which the debate can take place.

Although there is a wide breadth of literature looking at how various acts, types and mediums of journalism fulfil these functions (Gaynor & O'Brien, 2017; Gripsrud, 2007; Rauchfleisch & Kovic, 2016), most in some way touch upon at least one of the minimal functions outlined by McNair or Kovach & Rosenstiel.

The overarching role of journalism can be roughly summed up by the idea that it is there to hold to account those in power by disseminating the truth about the goings on in society in a manner which makes sense to the public and by providing a forum on which the goings on can be discussed and debated (see Monck. A, 2008 and Schudson. M, 2008). Another way to sum up the purpose of journalism is provided by the American Press Institute which says that journalism exists “to provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments.” (2014).

With this in mind, does pursuing objectivity as a signifier of good journalism, help achieve the goals of journalism?

Oren Soffer (2009) argues that seeking objectivity does not help achieve them. The reason for this is that he believes that there has been a shift from a monological model to a more dialogue based model. This monological model or as Krippendorff describes it a “message-driven model” (1993: 34), originated in the 1890's when the penny press came into popularity due to the fact that it appealed to a wide audience because it replaced a partisan ideological voice with a non-partisan objective voice (Soffer, 2009: 478). In doing so, the traits that are associated with objectivity which were outlined earlier, were cemented together with journalism and importantly, successful journalism. Soffer believes that journalism objectivity became code for a set of characteristics,

namely those that were outlined by Mindich (1998) earlier. Ward believes that journalists have attached themselves to objectivity, as the values that are encompassed by it produce journalism that best informs the public and is hence, successful journalism and beneficial to the public sphere. This Ward argues leads to more “intrinsic public goods, such as a democratic way of life” (Ward, 1991: 7).

The problem that Soffer identifies with objectivity preventing the goals of journalism is that whilst objectivity aims to create a gap between the journalist and the subject, the goal of modern journalism is to create a dialogue by acting as a forum in society where the public can voice their views and opinions, which is of course one of the functions outlined by McNair and an element of Habermas’ public sphere.

To further the argument that objectivity does not help achieve the goals of journalism is that the pursuit for objectivity can actually be a source for bias. This idea is put forward by Bennet in which he argues that journalism is biased not in spite of the standards of professional objectivity but precisely because these standards are intended to prevent bias (1983: 76). What is meant by this is that by relying on official sources for information, this can actually distort the manner in which a story is perceived as it turns the “political polyphony into a monologue.” (Soffer, 2009: 483). The call for the importance of dialogue in journalism is also supported by Anderson et al. (1994) who believe that the interaction between people should be seen as an elemental part of journalism. Their line of thinking is that by treating journalism as a dialogue rather than a one-way flow of information, it would become easier to recognise journalism's relation to other forms of communication. On top of this as Pauly. J. J points out, dialogue would “encourage public journalism to confront issues of ownership, access and professional power.” (2003: 28).

Before discussing the potential shift in news values given the evolving debate around the notion of objectivity, it is important to consider the concepts of bias, ethics and types of news stories being created as these concepts help inform discussions around production norms.

## **1.5: Ethics, bias and objectivity**

In a broad sense, ethics is “the study of the formation of moral values and of principles of right and wrong” (Altschull, 1990: 357). A lot of the theorizing about journalistic ethics has been concerned with finding universal norms that can be applied across media systems that reside in different cultures (Plaisance et al, 2012: 461) and whether it is possible to concretely lay out universal norms is a question which cannot be answered in the scope of this thesis. However, empirical studies on journalists by Plaisance et al (2012) and Kepplinger & Knirsch (2001) show that there does seem to be some general consensus in regards towards the rationality of actions in certain scenarios. An example of this comes from Kepplinger & Knirsch’s study within which a majority of those surveyed believed that they, as in journalists, “share the responsibility for foreseeable yet unintended negative consequence of their stories” (2001: 12). These general consensuses can be seen across many journalism organisations that have a code of ethics.

Whilst Hafez (2002) points out that there is an apparent agreement when it comes to things such as truth and objectivity, there are also a number of other common elements that can be found in these guidelines. Themes such as accuracy, fairness, privacy and respect for the public interest appear many times in the ethics codes of numerous journalism organisations (Pew Research Journalism Project, 2013). These codes can be seen to be a framework from which a journalist within an organisation can operate without bringing the organisation or the practice into disrepute. It is arguable that there can be no single ethical framework which could be used for every journalistic organisation. This is solely down to the different mediums of journalism as well as the topics which are covered. One attempt to create such a framework is by the Poynter Institute which is a prominent non-profit organisation that promotes journalism and the business that surrounds the industry. The organisation suggests that there should be three guiding principles for journalists, which are to seek and report the truth, to be

transparent and to engage with the community as an end rather than as a means (Poynter, 2013). Other organisations such as the International Journalists' Network have proposed similar principles, but specifically single out the principle of minimizing harm to sources and the wider community (International Journalists' Network, 2013).

Despite there being some apparent agreement on certain ethical concepts in journalism which can be seen in numerous organisations such as those listed earlier, Shoemaker and Rees point out that “no code of conduct can prescribe behaviour in every possible situation; interpretation of ethical standards and specific decisions must be made by individual journalists.” (1996: 94). With seemingly no universally agreed upon way on how a journalist should behave in every possible situation, the behaviour of journalists comes into constant question by both academics and the public alike (see Petley, 2012). The ethical standards of journalists also can come into contention with the other values of journalism such as public decency and convention. As Breed points out “accurate reporting is sometimes sacrificed to these other virtues of respect, decency, and order, that is, the mass media have often placed more emphasis on some value other than truth” (1964: 183).

Another one of these values of journalism is one of the elements of the journalistic ideology laid out by Kovatch and Rosentiel, which is to be of benefit to the public. This ties into the notion of journalistic ethics as it is an ethical decision that is made by either the journalist or the editor as to whether or not the reporting of a story is to the benefit of the public and thereby is also of benefit towards the notion of the public sphere.

When working under the assumption that an audience is paying attention to the information they are receiving, the reporting of news by necessity, increases a person's knowledge of the world they live in. The benefits of knowing news can be shown in any number of examples, such as knowing whether it is safe to travel to a particular country or not, whether your current elected representative is corrupt and hence must be ousted from their position, or whether you should evacuate due to an impending tornado. When information is withheld from the public, they are unable to make an informed decision

and therefore the action of withholding information can be seen as detrimental towards the public sphere.

However, as the notion of public benefit is something that is hard to scientifically measure due to its unquantifiable nature, there are some cases where a journalist must make an ethical decision on whether to report a certain aspect of a story or the entire story at all. The reporting of an imminent terrorist attack for instance may not potentially benefit the public as such a report may panic people to the extent that the ensuing chaos may cause more damage than would have happened otherwise. The point made with this example is relevant to the discussion about objectivity as the leaving out of certain aspects of a story could be seen to be decreasing the objectivity of a story as the journalist has not presented all of the facts that are known to them.

This all ties back towards what Carpentier & Trioen described as the problem of what journalists “want to do on the one side and what they actually do on the other.” (2010: 317). This gap, Carpentier & Trioen propose, can be potentially solved by opening up the profession of journalism so that it can more easily acknowledge the existence of the gap and the “problems that arise from its existence” (2010: 324). Of the two solutions that are proposed to close this gap, the first comes from Luyendijk who argues for a radical openness in which there not only needs to be a new “journalism about journalism” (2006: 175) but also a radical other form of journalism that allows its news coverage to integrate discussion about the problems and uncertainties that relate to the notion of objectivity. The hope here is that through reflection on their own practice, journalists will become more aware of the gap between what they want to do and what they actually do and in turn, act accordingly to close the gap. The second solution is put forward by Carpentier & Trioen themselves in which they argue that “exploring the possibilities and advantages of a form of journalism that does not consequently and necessarily exclude moral judgement and detachment” (2010: 324). The difference between this solution and Luyendijk’s is that rather than radical openness, it is more of a plea for an ambivalent position that has a mixture of both the rejection of the professionalism and an acceptance of personal responsibility.

## 1.6: Hard news and soft news

One final aspect in relation to the core concepts of news that are relevant to this thesis is the variance of importance between news stories. That is to say why is it that some topics are deemed to be more important than others. In academia a common way of distinguishing between stories of great importance of those of lesser importance is to describe news stories as either hard news or soft news.

The first differentiation between hard and soft news was put forward by Tuchman in 1972. The idea of these two classifications, is to separate items of news that have high news value and those that do not. Those that have a high amount of news value are deemed to be hard news. These are often stories that relate to topics that are deemed to be of greater importance to the wider community or public sphere, such as economics or politics and because of the nature of these topics, are often more substantive in terms of the informational value. Limor and Mann (1997) reiterate this definition of hard news by also believing that it involves topics such as politics or social affairs as these are often of greater importance and of a shorter lifespan. Other scholars have put emphasis on the more factual nature of hard news (Whetmore, 1987), or being less sensationalist and connected to any ongoing trend or event in society (Patterson, 2000). In contrast, soft news stories are often gossip or human interest stories (Lehman-Wilzig, 2010) that do not require immediate publication and contain little substantive information.

This dichotomous characterization of the news has shaped the way in which many academic studies have been conducted. Studies investigating the effect of soft news on a person's political knowledge (Prior, 2003), or the influence that soft news can have on a person's understanding of an important issue (Baum, 2003), brings forth the notion that academic research in the field of journalism can be focussed upon one type of news or the other.

Despite the importance of these two concepts, there is in fact a multitude of varying definitions other than the ones mentioned above. This produces problems when one wishes to make comparisons between different studies on this topic as many of the competing definitions use a set of components rather than a single characteristic. An example of vast differences in the interpretations of the terms hard and soft news can be seen between Shoemaker (2006) and Patterson (2000). Shoemaker's definition is focussed around the sole characteristic of timeliness in that soft news is often differentiated from hard news because it does not have to be published as quickly. By contrast Patterson (2000: 3-4) suggests that:

Hard news refers to coverage of breaking events involving top leaders, major issues, or significant disruptions in the routines of daily life, such as an earthquake or airline disaster. Information about these events is presumably important to citizens' ability to understand and respond to the world of public affairs.

This when combined with his later discussion on how the news is being softened alludes to a more multifaceted approach to the term of hard news. One should also make note of the various alternative terms that are used around this topic, those being tabloidization and infotainment. Both terms bare relation to soft news, or the softening of news and also suffer from the same criticisms of "conceptual fuzziness" that those trying to define hard and soft news do (Reinemann et al, 2012). It is because these other terms bare many similar traits to that of hard and soft news and are oftentimes used as synonyms, this thesis will continue to use hard and soft news as the primary terms on this topic.

One of the criticisms of the hard news/soft news distinction is that due to, at least some interpretations of the terms, there is a binary nature in which one can assign an article of news thereby leaving no in-between area for certain pieces of news that are neither particularly hard or soft. Reinemann et al (2012), identified five dimensions that are



most commonly used when trying to define the term. These were topic, news production, news focus, news style and news reception. Through their work, Reinemann et al discovered that of the studies looking at hard and soft news, only a quarter of them used solely one of these dimensions whereas the most commonly used dimension was the topic (Ibid: 226). What this suggests is that the only real form of consensus on this issue is that the topic of the news story is commonly perceived in academia to be the most important factor when deciding whether or not a story is hard or soft news. This idea also links back to the notion of the public sphere in that hard news stories could be seen as those being the most beneficial to the public sphere as they have most newsworthiness. Certain topics such as politics would under most academic studies be deemed more beneficial to the public sphere and hence society, than any soft news topics. Habermas (1989: 170) did believe that hard news topics particularly ones of a political nature were both reported and consumed less and less due to the commercialisation of the news industry.

One problem for academia is that certain stories may be hard to define as certain topics may fall into either the hard or soft news categories depending on their context and also whose definition of hard and soft news one is using. As there is no academic consensus saying that topics x, y and z are hard news and a, b and c are soft, there have been proposals for a third category of news called 'general news' which would dismantle the problem of the dichotomous nature of the hard and soft news divide.

One such proposal has been put forward by Lehman-Wizlig and Seletzky (2010) in which they suggest a number of criteria which can be applied to a news story. They separate out a third category, that being general news in which such stories are not as substantive as those in the hard news category, but still have a higher news value than those in the soft news category. The criteria that they put forward are:

- 1 Recent economic, social or cultural news that should be published but not necessarily immediately;

- 2 Important demographic data, academic reports, scientific discoveries or technological inventions that should be reported but not necessarily right away;
- 3 Important news that is relevant or influential, not for society in general but only for a specific group;
- 4 Important news not on the present public agenda, so that if not immediately reported would not readily be missed;
- 5 Personally useful information for the reader ('how to'; analysis of how news can personally affect the reader, e.g change in tax law) that need not be reported right away. (2010: 47-48)

As can be seen when contrasted with the definitions given earlier by other scholars, there is certainly a case to be made for a third classification of news stories, for ones that are neither sensationalist or of national importance. The case to be made for no longer adhering to a binary classification of news stories is strengthened by the fact that for many years now, there has been a blurring of lines between hard and soft news (Carpini. D and Williams. B, 2001) As has been noted in separate studies by Esser (1999) and Sampson (1999) the gap between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers has slowly been diminishing since the 1980's. Lehman-Wizlig and Seletzky argue that especially in today's modern era of internet communication wherein websites act as portals where "one finds fast-breaking 'hard' news, general news and sensationalist 'soft' news mixed together within a larger, non-'news' information framework." (2010: 51), it is becoming increasingly difficult to be able to clearly separate out hard news stories from soft ones.

One criticism of the idea that there is some sort of spectrum ranging from very soft news to very hard news on which all news stories can be placed, which is what Lehman-Wizlig and Seletzky seem to suggest, is that it creates greater complexity when attempting to analyse results from studies. It should be contended that whilst that may be the case, this is not a negative thing and that having to rely on a binary classification of news stories simply dulls the potential for more in depth analysis.

The need for a more complex classification of news is matched by the increasingly complex field of journalism as Lehman-Wizlig and Seletzky (2010: 51) point out:

Certainly such an intermediate category is called for in the emerging research sub-field of e-journalism. Among other things, the internet has invented a novel news venue: portals. Here one finds fast-breaking 'hard' news, general news and sensationalist 'soft' news mixed together within a larger, non-'news' information framework. One cannot understand the types of news substance and also the types of news venues on the internet without adding a 'general' news category to the mix.

Under the binary hard/soft classification system, especially when considering some definitions of hard news such as by Patterson (2000), the potential for stories being miscategorised could increase due to the factors pointed out in the quote above. This would lead it to be thrown in with celebrity gossip stories and any academic analysis could seem to have odd results. Allowing for a third category of general news, which the hypothetical story would fall into, would overcome this problem.

Overall, I believe that there is a good case to be made that there is no universally agreed upon definition of hard and soft news in that the application of such a definition to any news story would easily categorize the story as simply hard or soft news. Alongside the definitions detailed above where the topic of the story, the time sensitivity of it, the presentation of it, the issues of gradual softening of news due to commercial pressures and scholars even proposing a third category in between hard and soft, all present different ways in which studies can approach this issue. The reason why this is relevant to this study is that YouTube has often been perceived as a platform which hosts unserious content, most famously cat videos (Myrick, 2015). However, as traditional news organisations are utilising the platform more, the combination of a platform for the unserious or soft, with the sometimes serious and hard news content of the established news organisations forces scholars to consider the idea that the convergence of communication cultures, those being the unserious amateur nature of

YouTube with the serious professionalism of print or broadcast news may contribute towards the discussion around the systems of evaluation of news quality. This then brings into question the concept of news values as what sort of content the news industry decides to create has a profound impact on the public sphere and thereby society.

### **1.7: News values**

So far, this chapter has discussed how the concept of the public sphere, though flawed, is vital to a healthy democracy and that the public sphere is only able to exist if journalism fulfils its role and provides news information to the citizenry. Given this, it is then important to consider what factors may be at play when journalists are deciding what stories to report on.

When deciding what is newsworthy, journalists themselves say that they rely upon “gut feeling” (Schultz, 2007), or that something is news “Because it just is!” (Brighton and Foy 2007: 147). These types of definitions are vague at best and as Harcup and O’Neill suggest, “obscure as much as they reveal about news selection, prompting academics to offer their own explanations, which can involve devising taxonomies of news values.” (2017: 1470). The first attempt at creating a taxonomy of news values was by Galtung & Ruge in 1965. They identified 12 factors that influenced the newsworthiness of a story. These were: Frequency, Threshold, Unambiguity, Meaningfulness, Consonance, Unexpectedness, Continuity, Composition, Reference to elite nations, Reference to elite people, Reference to persons and Reference to something negative. Despite Galtung & Ruge acknowledging that this was not a complete list and was open to exception (1965: 64), it is worth reviewing each of these factors not only due to them being the foundation for more contemporary taxonomies of news values but also because of their relationship with concepts such as objectivity and bias that have already been explored in this chapter.

The first factor identified by Galtung & Ruge was 'frequency' where "An event that unfolds at the same or similar frequency as the news medium (such as a murder) is more likely to be selected as news than is a social trend that takes place over a long period of time." (1965: 65). This factor has arguably diminished in terms of its weight in determining the newsworthiness of a story since Galtung & Ruge's conception of it. This is due to two key changes in the production of news. The first of which is that in a 24/7 news cycle afforded by digital technologies, an event's newsworthiness is not determined by its suitability to the news production cycle, namely a newspaper's deadline. The second key change is the growth of the public relations industry where the newness of a story can be artificially generated in order for it to be covered by a news organisation. Further questions around Galtung & Ruge's definition of frequency can be asked due to digital technologies now affording journalists the ability to far more easily track trends in society such as through the use of hashtags and other metrics (Brantner, Lobinger & Stehling 2020; Barnard, 2018).

The second factor identified by Galtung & Ruge was 'threshold' which they defined as "Events have to pass a threshold before being recorded at all. After that, the greater the intensity, the more gruesome the murder, and the more casualties in an accident - the greater the impact on the perception of those responsible for news selection." (1965: 65). One of the key issues in understanding this factor is the manner in which the line for the threshold is set as this is arguably a wholly subjective one. To illustrate this, in their review of Galtung & Ruge's list, Harcup & O'Neill pose the question "Which is bigger - 20 deaths in ten road accidents or five deaths in one rail crash? (2001: 268). The threshold factor can also be applied to concepts outside of murder and death. The humour or funniness of an event must arguably cross a certain threshold before it is considered newsworthy. The subjective nature of determining when an event reaches a certain threshold to be deemed newsworthy relates back to this chapter's earlier discussion around the notion of subjectivity. It was argued that objectivity was not attainable in any practical sense and if one is to consider some of Galtung & Ruge's news values as requiring a certain level of subjective interpretation, this is then yet more support for the aforementioned argument.

To further emphasise this, one can look at the third factor on Galtung & Ruge's list which is 'unambiguity' in which they state "The less ambiguity, the more likely the event is to become news. The more clearly an event can be understood, and interpreted without multiple meanings, the greater the chance of it being selected." (1965: 65). Firstly, it must be asked whether the ambiguity lies in the event itself or in the journalist's interpretation of the event, The nature of an event may be intrinsically unambiguous or it may be the case that the event has been interpreted by the journalist as such. An example to illustrate this would be military action taken by one country against another. Whilst the justifications for military intervention may be presented as necessary and therefore unambiguous in motive (Christie, 2006), the actual event itself may be ambiguous in nature. Secondly, the value of unambiguity is arguably ingrained into many newsroom media logics due to journalists being "trained to write the 'intros' to their news stories in an unambiguous way, with a clear news angle in the first couple of sentences" (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001: 269). Given this chapter's earlier discussion around the purposes of journalism, one of which being to provide the public with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, then stories that are clear and unambiguous in nature are arguably better suited for fulfilling this purpose. However, once again a subjective decision is made by the journalist or news organisation in determining what they think is an unambiguous story and one that would require a lot of background knowledge and context to be fully understood.

The fourth factor on Galtung & Ruge's list of news values, 'meaningfulness', is also victim to subjective interpretations. They say that "The culturally similar is likely to be selected because it fits into the news selector's frame of reference. Thus, the involvement of UK citizens will make an event in a remote country more meaningful to the UK media. Similarly, news from the USA is seen as more relevant to the UK than is news from countries which are less culturally familiar." (1965: 65). Galtung & Ruge interpret this news value in two distinct ways. The first is through the concept of cultural proximity in which a journalist and thereby the public, is more likely to pay attention to an event if it culturally similar or recognisable to them. The second is in terms of an

events relevance wherein an event may not have any cultural proximity, but it may still have meaning due to what the event may imply for the audience. As will be further explored in chapter 3, due to technologies enabling audiences to choose what sort of news they wish to consume and the growth of digital spaces that can cater for niche audiences, the news value of meaningfulness can be seen as still relevant in today's journalism.

Galtung & Ruge's fifth news value of 'consonance' falls under particular criticism from other scholars. According to Galtung & Ruge, consonance is where "The news selector may predict - or, indeed, want - something to happen, thus forming a mental 'pre-image' of an event which in turn increases its chances of becoming news." (1965: 65). This value is problematic in that it requires scholars to guess when it has been applied in story selection if at all. Work by Niblock & Machin (2007) highlights how journalists have a clear sense of the market segments which they want their content to appeal to and hence choose stories that they think appeal to this segment of the public. Their work showed how news editors are "thinking 'instinctively' about choosing news to fit a lifestyle group" (2007: 195), in essence predicting that a story is newsworthy to their audience, thereby making it newsworthy.

The news value of unexpectedness wherein "The more unexpected the signal, the more probable that it will be recorded as worth listening to." (Galtung & Ruge, 1965: 65) speaks toward the notion that rarer events have more inherent news value in them. Whilst this would seem self-evident, in contemporary journalism the value on unexpectedness has become a less frequently observed value in the content that newsrooms produce. This is due to the context in which journalism is now being produced, namely one where the expansion of the PR industry has brought with it both pre-arranged and pre-packaged events which newsrooms are heavily reliant upon for content (Lewis et al, 2008). Whilst this is also evidenced in Harcup & O'Neill's study of news values (2001), given the growth of the PR industry since the conduction of their research, one could assume that the existence of this value being found in news stories today is even less so.

The next two news values proposed by Galtung & Ruge speak more towards the pragmatics of news production rather than intrinsic value of a news story itself. These values are 'continuity' and 'composition'. Continuity is to be understood as "If one signal has been tuned in to the more likely it will continue to be tuned in to as worth listening to." (Galtung & Ruge, 1965: 65). That is to say that a news organisation is more likely to cover a story if it has already covered similar stories pertaining to the same event, genre or people involved. The reason why this is linked to news production is that if a newsroom has already dedicated resources to a particular story and the event is ongoing, then the newsroom is likely to keep those resources in place to keep reporting on the story. An example of this would be having reporters embedded in warzones. The benefits of employing such a news value is that not only does it allow for journalists to develop expertise and knowledge on a particular topic, but the public's familiarity with a story can help increase greater understanding of issues related to that story (Morris, 2005). The news value of composition is described by Galtung & Ruge as "the more a signal has been tuned in to, the more probable that a very different kind of signal will be recorded as worth listening to next time." (1965: 65). This value is also concerned with the production of news in that it speaks towards the notion of balance. Whilst earlier in this chapter the concept of balance was explored regarding the balance of voices on a given topic, here balance is meant in terms of the overall content of newspaper or news broadcast. This balance can be viewed through a number of lens such as between the number of domestic and international based stories or between hard and soft news stories. A newspaper editor who sees his daily edition as having too many hard news domestic stories may then place greater news value on a soft international story simply to balance out the composition of the newspaper as a whole.

The ninth and tenth news values proposed by Galtung & Ruge are based on the news media's preponderance to focus on elite nations and people. They argue that "the actions of the elite are, at least usually and in short-term perspective, more consequential than the activities of others" (1965: 68) and are thus more worthy of news coverage. Within contemporary journalism the concept of elite people has expanded



from Galtung & Ruge's conception where royalty is used as the example, to one where celebrities and people of notoriety or high status are included in this category. This redefining of elite people by the news industry is reflected in more recent attempts in academia in creating a list of news values, however as Bednarek & Caple's review of these lists states, the "main differences occur in the naming/labelling of this news value" (2017: 34) rather than in any substantive reimagining of the term 'elite'..

The penultimate news value proposed by Galtung & Ruge relates to the issue of personification wherein "The more the event can be seen in personal terms, as due to the action of specific individuals, the more probable that it will become a news item." (1965: 68). Galtung & Ruge attempt to explain this value through a number of ways such as it being a result of audiences needing to be able to identify with a subject matter and that "persons can serve more easily as objects of positive and negative identification" (1965:69), through the mechanisms of empathy or projection. They also suggest that personification is the result of the news gathering process wherein it is easier to take a picture of a person than it is of a societal structure. The notion of being able to empathise with the subject of a story is something that will be returned to in chapter 2 wherein the "experience of involvement" (Peters, 2011: 305), will be explored in more depth given the link between emotionality and journalism. The news value of personification has been broadly seen as one of the most common news values throughout the history of journalism (Parks, 2019a), often interpreted by scholars to mean 'human interest'. Studies that have looked at the presence of news values in story selection have often used the label of 'human interest' rather than the label of 'reference to persons' (Yang & Cannon, 2017; Parks, 2019b; Araujo & Meer, 2020) and as will be touched on shortly, human interest is sometimes placed as a sub-category of a broader news value label

The final news value in Galtung & Ruge's taxonomy is concerned with negativity in that "The more negative the event in its consequences, the more probable that it will become a news item." (1965:69). Their argument for its inclusion on their list is based largely upon the case that negative news often more easily satisfies several of their

other news values such as frequency, unambiguity and unexpectedness. Alongside these justifications one could also argue that one of the reasons that this news value is often present in news stories (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), is that the audience is generally drawn to negative stories over positive ones (Stafford, 2014) and hence there are financial motives at play when considering story selection. A key question surrounding this news value is to whom may a story be negative? Whilst there may indeed be some unambiguously negative stories such as natural disasters, bad news stories pertaining to areas such as business or politics may be viewed as bad news for some people, but good news for others. Whether a journalist interprets an event as good or bad news is a critical issue in terms of understanding the production of news and this will be explored in chapter 2, through discussion around the concept of framing.

As has been noted, even though Galtung & Ruge accepted at the time that this list was not complete and was open to exception (1965: 64), their list of news values has remained a fundamental part in any discussion around news values, with it arguably being the “most influential explanation” of news values (McQuail, 2010: 270). Despite its influence, there are a number of problems with their theory aside from the ones raised for some of the individual values they proposed.

One of these problems arises from the subject matter of their study, which was on major international events. By only focusing on these large events and not ‘average’ day to day events. This meant that their criteria for newsworthiness was based upon the selected crises and as Turnstall (1971) points out, their list of factors made no reference to the role that elements outside of the written material, namely dramatic photographs, could have on the newsworthiness of the story. Further questions have been raised about Galtung & Ruge’s news values due to the context they were written in. As McGregor (2002) points out, the prevalence of television, let alone the internet, could not have been imagined by the two scholars and so the increasing commercial rationale of the news media along with the challenge posed to “old” news formats by “new” news formats was also outside the comprehension of previous theory development about newsworthiness.” (Ibid). Similar points have also been put forward by Bednarek & Caple

who state that the limited data used by Galtung & Ruge “may thus not apply equally to other types of news” (2017: 31).

Due to the age of the study, there have been multiple attempts to create a new taxonomies of news values or refinements to existing ones. One such example of a contemporary list of news values is put forward by Harcup and O’Neill. They suggested the following 10 news values:

- “1. The power elite: Stories concerning powerful individuals, organisations or institutions.
  2. Celebrity: Stories concerning people who are already famous.
  3. Entertainment: Stories concerning sex, showbusiness, human interest, animals, an unfolding drama, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, entertaining photographs or witty headlines.
  4. Surprise: Stories that have an element of surprise and/or contrast.
  5. Bad news: Stories with particularly negative overtones, such as conflict or tragedy.
  6. Good news: Stories with particularly positive overtones, such as rescues and cures.
  7. Magnitude: Stories that are perceived as sufficiently significant either in the numbers of people involved or in potential impact.
  8. Relevance: Stories about issues, groups and nations perceived to be relevant to the audience.
  9. Follow-up: Stories about subjects already in the news.
  10. Newspaper agenda: Stories that set or fit the news organisation’s own agenda
- (Harcup and O’Neill, 2001: 278–279).

Just as was the case with Galtung & Ruge’s list, Harcup and O’Neil accept that their list is “not as the last word on news values” (2017: 1471) and that these 10 values only

provide a partial explanation towards the decision making process in newsrooms. Other proposed news values include values such as significance; drama; surprise; personalities; sex, scandal and crime; numbers; prominence; proximity; timeliness; action; novelty; human interest and humour (Hetherington 1985: 8-9; Herbert, 2000: 318).

Given the rise of visual mediums since Galtung & Ruge, McGregor has proposed four additional values that are used in determining what stories are selected by journalists namely, “visualness, emotion, conflict and the ‘celebrification of the journalist’” (McGregor, 2002). The addition of ‘conflict’ to any news value taxonomy is argued for by Phillips (2015: 18) who contends it is a separate value to Harcup and O’Neil’s ‘bad news’. This point raises the slightly broader argument that there is a degree of overlap between the proposed values as for instance, some may view Harcup and O’Neil’s value of ‘celebrity’ to be a subset or derivation of Galtung & Ruge’s ‘reference to elite people’ value.

One important part of a taxonomy of news values is identify which aspect of the news making process the value is applied to. For instance, the value of ‘celebrity’ or ‘surprise’ is more concerned with the event itself whereas values such as ‘follow-up’ or the ‘newspaper’s agenda’ are more concerned with the coverage of the story. Caple & Bednarak (2013) have shown that research looking at news values focuses on the areas of events, stories, news agenda, commercial factors and journalistic practices. Across each of these types of news values, a certain level of overlap can be seen such as Brighton & Foy’s “external influences” (2007: 29) and O’Neill & Harcup’s (2008: 171) “occupational routines, budgets, the market and ideology” being news values in the news making process. What this example and the other synonymous values pointed out above suggests, is that there is an issue when it comes to labelling news values. Not only does this speak to the “gut feeling” that Shultz (2007) refers to in how journalists define what is newsworthy, but also how there is a necessary “subjective interpretation on the part of the researchers” (Harcup & O’Neill, 2001: 269). Determining whether an event is ‘surprising’ or if it is ‘bad news’ is a subjective process that scholars must be

mindful of both when constructing news value taxonomies and when considering the findings of studies using such taxonomies.

Another issue regarding the concept of news values is the importance or weight that is afforded to each value. When first proposing their list of 10 news values, Harcup & O'Neill felt that they were "not in a position to demonstrate empirically a clear hierarchy of news values" (2001: 275) but that "certain combinations of news values appear almost to guarantee coverage in the press" (Ibid). However in later work O'Neill believes that at least within the British quality press, that "celebrity/entertainment news values would appear to have risen much higher up the hierarchy of news, guaranteeing extensive coverage if combined with other news values such as surprise and bad news" (2012: 26). This notion is further expanded upon in her and her colleague's revisiting of their earlier work on news values where they say given that their proposed news values are influenced by things such as availability of resources, ideological/cultural backgrounds of the journalist and the type of audience the journalist is producing the new for, that these news values may rise or fall in terms of importance in different situations (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017: 1483). Other scholars such as Hall et al (1978) have pointed towards the value of negativity as being the key criterion in determining the newsworthiness of a story. McGregor on the other hand argues that the value of 'visualness' is the most prominent news value given how news is now driven "by pictures and their perceptual and iconic power." (2002).

In reviewing 50 years of work regarding Galtung & Ruge's news values, Joye et al (2016) consider it important to keep in mind three levels of context when discussing news values. The first of these is the individual level where "journalistic ethics, ritualistic procedures of news production, as well as the (personal and professional) socialization of journalists and their concepts of self-definition and identity" (2016: 15) play a role in how an events newsworthiness is determined. The second level of context is the institutional level wherein the structures within the workplace such as the organisation itself, its owners or its advertisers, play a role in influencing the choice of event covered. The third level of context that Joye et al propose is the societal level whereby "norms,

ideologies and the moral-political discourses” (Ibid: 16) need to be taken into account when studying news values. Each of these levels is important to keep in mind for the context of this study given the nature of the organisations and platform being studied.

### **1.8: Audience attention**

One of the final concepts to explore in this chapter is audience attention. This is linked to the concept of news values as what can be considered a news value is dependent, at least in part, by the target audience that the story is intended for (Caple & Bednarak, 2013: 6). It is often assumed that news content is “intended to attract an audience through presenting a story to them that is newsworthy” (Bednarek and Caple 2012: 46), and it has even been proposed that “audience targeting” should be considered a news value itself (Machin & Niblock, 2006: 141). Given the role that journalism plays in the public sphere, it can be argued that for a democratic society to function it is important for journalists and news organisations to obtain the public’s attention and keep it focused on events deemed highly newsworthy.

One approach to the link between news values and audience attention is given by Shoemaker et al (1991) who propose a news value model based on the concepts of ‘deviance’ and ‘social significance’. The deviance value is comprised of “novelty/oddity/unusual (statistical deviance), prominence (normative deviance), sensationalism (normative or pathological deviance) and codit or controversy (normative deviance)” (Ibid: 783), whereas the social significance value is based on the potential impact or consequences of the story. Much like with other news value models, Shoemaker et al (1991) suggest that a high presence of their values would lead to greater coverage of an event. Shoemaker links this model to the concept of audience attention by theorizing that the public pays more attention to events that are both deviant and socially significant (1996). Her argument for this comes from an evolutionary biology perspective in that as humans, we survey our environment and try to detect deviations (1996: 38) and we also socialize to learn what events should be considered important. This means that a person’s interest in the news is “the result of

an interaction between these two pure models, with humans both innately interested in deviant events and socialized to attend to events that have some significance to their particular culture and society.” (Ibid: 44).

The hypothesis that the more deviant and socially significant an event is, the more likely an audience will pay attention to it, is supported by Lee (2009). Lee found that the presence of these news values “significantly predicted audience attention when they were mediated by the media coverage.” (2009: 184). Further support linking the concept of news values with audience attention is provided by Sherwood et al (2017) who looked at the coverage of female sports in the Australian press and by Montgomery & Feng (2016) discussing the role of headlines in television news. A third study that can be seen to be linking news values and audience attention is by Wahl-Jorgensen et al which found that audiences valued user generated content in news stories as it was seen as “immediate and fresh, authentic, emotionally engaging” (2010: 190).

However, depending on the news value model that is being considered, it can be argued that the presence of some values negatively impacts the audience’s attention and thereby the public sphere. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the rise of infotainment and growing focus on soft news stories can be seen as harmful towards the public sphere (Graber, 1994). Nguyen argues that contrary to the claim that soft news helps the public sphere because it helps “keep attention-scarce publics with the news” (2012: 706), there is in fact little evidence to suggest a “significant effect for the taste for soft news on news attachment among the general public” (Ibid). If one were to adopt Harcup and O’Neill’s news value model, the values of ‘celebrity’ and ‘entertainment’ would appear to be detrimental towards the public’s attention towards a story. Given O’Neill’s previously mentioned work, suggesting that the news value of ‘celebrity’ has risen in prominence (2012), a conflict arises in that a story that may be deemed newsworthy due to its high level of celebrity or entertainment value is also harmful towards the public sphere as such a story would do little to keep the public’s attention.

This problem can also be seen when adopting Shoemaker's 'deviance' and 'social significance' model (1991). Lee (2009) highlights this problem in pointing towards Graber's study (1988) which found that "the most commonly attended news events were about politically significant information about congress, state government, city government, and the court system. Deviant events were not often mentioned." and that Cooper & Roter's study about health news (2000) found that deviant events "ranked as the least attracting events" (Lee, 2009: 185). Given that the deviance news value is partly associated with the notion of sensationalism (Shoemaker et al, 1991: 783) it could be suggested that when considering a hierarchy of news values, attention must not only be paid towards the impact that a value has on the newsworthiness of the story, but also on the impact it may have on the audience.

One final consideration regarding news values and audience attention is society that is producing and utilizing these values. Research by Zhang et al (2013) which applied Shoemaker's news value model to American and Chinese newspaper coverage of terrorist attacks found that "US newspapers are more sensitive to cultural significance than Chinese media" (2013: 468). Cultural differences in how news values are applied to events is an important consideration for this study given the focus on mainly American and Western news media.

## **1.9: Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to outline some of the core concepts that are often discussed within journalism studies. Habermas' public sphere concept serves as a way of discussing the intersection between the public and the role that the news media plays in a democratic society. Although the public sphere may only be a theorized ideal (Dahlgren, 1995) rather than anything that has actually existed, even if it does exist, it has been gradually degraded through the entrance of commercial forces, the dumbing down of content (Slevin, 2000) and other various evolutions in journalistic routines and practices.



With it being established that journalism does play some role in the functioning of a democracy, this chapter next explored the ideology underpinning journalism and how the notion of an ideology is one way to understand what the core concepts are within journalism as it is this collective ideology of those working within the institution that determines what is valued and seen as indicative of good journalism. From this, it is argued that Kovach and Rosenstiel's five elements of journalism are a solid encapsulation of what are generally held to be things that indicate good journalism. Of those five elements, this chapter argues that objectivity is the most important owing to the large number of scholars who also contend the same thing. With objectivity being held in high regard by both scholars and practitioners alike, this chapter examines the part that it plays in terms of the role journalism plays in society in relation to Habermas' concept of the public sphere.

Next this chapter details how other elements of Kovach and Rosenstiel's theory are related to the public sphere and are important factors to consider regarding any study looking at the content that is being produced by journalists. The different styles that this content can take is detailed around the concepts of hard and soft news alongside the difficulties of having these often rigidly described categories. The concepts of hard and soft news also brings to light the notion that certain types of stories can be treated more harshly than others under the lens of objectivity.

Finally, this chapter explored the concept of news values by discussing various models of news values put forward by the likes of Galtung & Ruge (1965), Harcup & O'Neill (2001) and Shoemaker et al (1991). What is highlighted in the discussion is that any proposed list of news values has to acknowledge the medium of news which they are being applied to (McGregor, 2002), the context of the news value itself (Joye et al, 2016) and the culture/society that is generating those values (Zhang et al, 2013).

The aim of this chapter was to present several concepts that together, highlight how scholars have discussed the purpose of journalism and how the concepts within ideology of journalism inform the role that it plays within a democratic society. These

ideas are relevant to this study as given the changes to news production and consumption within the last decade, they can be applied and used to discuss more contemporary of the journalism industry, namely, the use of YouTube as a platform for news. However, before exploring the literature relating to YouTube specifically, it is important to consider some of the factors that may have contributed towards changes in both news production and consumption, these being the use of emotions and framing.

## CHAPTER 2: The role of emotions and frames in journalism

Managing editor of PBS NewsHour and famed US journalist Judy Woodruff once said that to be a successful journalist “you need to care about the world around you.” (Woodruff, 2015). This sentiment is often shared by other journalists and scholars alike (de Aguiar, 2017). This poses a fundamental challenge to elements of the journalistic ideology discussed in the previous chapter where strict objectivity and a distancing from the subject are championed. For the conflict between objectivity and expression of passion or empathy to be resolved, or at least better understood, one must look at how news stories are written and how emotions play a role in that process. To do this, this chapter aims to unpack the notion of framing, how emotions enter into the process of framing and then ultimately what the impact of emotions within journalistic frames has on the audience. It is important to understand the role that emotions and framing have on an audience in relation to this particular study due to this study being in part concerned with the notion of user engagement and as will be discussed below, the invocation of emotion has the ability to stir the public to action. The reason why particular attention is given to the concept of framing in this chapter is due in part to the widespread agreement amongst researchers that media frames exert at least some influence over audiences (Constantinescu & Tedesco, 2007).

When any news event is put through the journalistic process, that is to say the treatment it is given in regards to its perceived value and the manner in which the event is portrayed to the public, it has had what is called the concept of framing applied to it. Framing has been defined as a process wherein particular aspects of a perceived reality are assembled in a way so that a particular interpretation of an event is presented to an audience (Entman, 2007: 164). A similar definition provided by Gamson is that framing is a “central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue” (1989: 157). He goes on to say that facts “possess no intrinsic meaning and are given meaning by being embedded in a frame or story line that organizes them and gives them coherence” (1989:157). Framing comes down to what elements of a story are emphasised and which parts are missed out or obfuscated.

The importance of understanding the concept of framing is underscored by the role it plays in determining how individuals and the public at large perceive and interpret events. Depending on the medium, there are various elements that are able to be used as a framing device such as video, audio and graphics. However one element that is consistent across the vast majority of journalism is the language that is used to describe an event. Language is always contextual, particularly so when it comes to emotive language.

There are a multitude of ways in which emotions, when depicted through language, can be categorised and measured. This chapter aims to outline attempts by scholars to do this as well as discuss how emotional words or phrases can change the way in which an audience perceives a news story.

## **2.1: Emotion within journalism**

In the field of psychology where the study of emotions is predominantly based, a contemporary description that has been used for the term is that “emotion consists of neural circuits (that are at least partially dedicated), response systems, and a feeling state/process that motivates and organizes cognition and action.” (Izard. C. E, 2010: 367). This definition however serves little purpose to the study of the use of emotive words in our language. To do this, one needs to look at work done in the field of linguistics as well as the use of language in journalism.

The concept of emotion in relation to the field of journalism has been somewhat left undertheorized in favour of focus upon other areas such as objectivity and ethics. This has been due to the fact that as Peters describes, it has been treated with “commonsensical discernment” and that this has led it to be melded with journalistic practices such as “sensationalism, bias, commercialization and the like” (2011: 297). Within journalism, the employment of emotion has often been seen as a negative and a symbol of “flawed journalism” (Peters. C, 2011) or as a “decay in journalistic quality”

(Pantti. M, 2010: 170). This is because it has been placed in direct contrast to objectivity which as described in the previous chapter, is perceived as one of the most important tenets of journalism. As outlined in the previous chapter, the importance of this tenet has been called into question. Also previously mentioned were the observations by both Carpini (2001) and Sampson (1999) that there has been a steady blurring of lines between information and entertainment, or broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. Despite the gradual meshing of news and entertainment over the last couple of decades (Jones. J, 2005), analysis of new forms of journalism still relies upon the supposed conflict between objectivity and emotion when assessing the quality of the journalism. Before exploring how the blurring of the lines between the news and entertainment has changed the practice of journalism, the notion of how emotion enters into the field of journalism must be considered.

The term 'emotion' has a range of meanings that have included words such as passions, moods, motives and feelings (Dixon. T, 2003). With a concrete definition arguably hard to settle on, Chris Peters has suggested that the focus of scholars should be on the "experience of involvement" (2011: 305) and that this should help produce more conscientious studies that look at the impact of the presentation of the news. Peters argues that journalism has always attempted to "induce some sort of experience in its audiences" (2011: 305) and that whilst this has been done through the use of commonly used narrative structures such as the use of heroes and villains (Lule, 2001), the journalist has always been expected to show some level of distance or detachment from the subject matter. Whilst the desire for detachment by journalists had been the norm for much of the practice's existence, changes in other professions in the last few decades as well as trends in society could be seen to have bled across into journalism and has resulted in a more personal style of journalism. Papers by Du Gay (1994), Laster & O'Malley (1996) and Lupton (1997), all make the case that in the professions of business, law and medicine respectively, there has been a move away from an impersonal style of practice towards a more sensitive style. Richards & Brown (2001) have used the term 'therapeutic culture' to describe the current trend in society in which there is a preoccupation with feelings and relationships.

This is not to say that rationalization has been completely rejected in these professions, but just that the “emotive posture of the profession has become varied” (Peters, 2011, 305). From these trends, one could argue that the impersonal, detached style of journalism that has often been linked with the notion of objectivity, has resulted in the perception of journalists who can appear uncaring or uninvolved. Whilst having emotional control as a journalist has often been thought of as a key skill of a journalist, Peters (2011: 306) believes that:

While this sort of thinking embraces that the experience of involvement – the moment of contact between an audience and a news text – matters, it ignores that assumptions underlie the crafting of news.

What this quote suggests is that when considering emotion in journalism, one should look at how motives with unlimited compositions are brought into every encounter with journalism (Lyng, 1990) and that rather than thinking of emotion within journalism in terms of substance, it should instead be seen as patterns of relationship (Burkitt, 2002). The key point here is that emotions only have meaning when they are placed in context and in relation to other things such as objects or ideologies.

The climate that we currently live in has appeared to have shifted (Barbalet, 1998) in recent decades, in regards to communication in that there appears to be a desire for more authentic emotional interactions as has been observed by Connor (2007) in which there has been a noticeable increase in the use of emoticons in digital interactions between people. With the apparent cultural trend that displays of emotion are no longer considered infantile, as can be seen in sports and film (see Dunning, 1999 and Elias, 1982), then as Peters points out, it should be no surprise to see that certain parts of cable news have become “highly involved, personalized, hour-long shows” (2011: 307). If this is the case, then it could also therefore be argued that utilisation of new platforms such as YouTube by established newsrooms would also display these same characteristics.

Another way to look at defining emotion in journalism is through what Pantti calls 'emotionality'. This term she argues can be defined in three ways: "in terms of the emotional state of the news sources, emotionally engaging images and emotional topics and case studies." (2010: 174). In a study by Pantti that looked at the accounts that journalists gave in regards to the issues of emotion in journalism, she found that 'news emotion' was commonly associated by the journalists, with strong emotional expressions such as through crying or the displaying of flowers after a tragic event. The purpose of emotionality in news for the journalists when it came to their sources, was that "it should either facilitate the understanding of a story or add an extra message to the story, rather than being the story itself" (2010: 174). One can extrapolate from this quote that emotionality forms part of the framing process as it aids in highlighting or emphasizing certain parts of the story

When considering emotional images, Pantti found that of the journalists interviewed, many shared the idea that the use of an emotional image can tell and explain more than just simple use of words. When it came to the subject of emotional topics, Pantti found that there was some uncertainty on some issues. For instance, whilst many linked emotional reporting with major news stories such as natural disasters, many also felt that the emotionality of a news story was not related to the topic. Some journalists also argued that emotionality was "more appropriate to some topics than to others" (2010: 175).

Building upon this notion of emotionality is the idea that there is a strategic ritual of emotionality in which "there is an institutionalized and systematic practice of journalists narrating and infusing their reporting with emotion, which means that journalistic storytelling, despite its allegiance to the ideal of objectivity, is also profoundly emotional." (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2013: 130). The story-telling aspect is an important one as it is through a narrative structure that an audience can develop empathy and identification with the protagonists' situation. The idea of using a narrative structure is also not a

recent revelation in journalism as Kitch has shown in that it has been used in instances of public mourning (Kitch, 2000; 2003).

When one considers both Peters' and Pantti's look at what is emotion when looking at journalism, a case can be made that the term 'emotion' should be seen as some amalgamation of "experience of involvement" and "emotionality" (as looked at through the three ways Pantti describes). However, one of the original points raised by Peters in that emotion has been treated with a "commonsensical discernment", is a very apt one as the word 'emotion' is somewhat of a malleable term that can be bent to fit the required purpose of any study. As Dixon points out, the word 'emotion' has had its criteria changed multiple times since the 1920's (Dixon, 2012). With this in mind then, the term 'emotion' when being considered in academic studies of journalism can be seen to be utilised in a very broad manner, within reason, to help said study in its investigation of a particular area.

## **2.2: What are the roles of emotion in journalism?**

Before proceeding to discuss the role of emotions in journalism, a brief amount of time needs to be spent outlining in a broad sense the common approaches to studying the utilisation of emotions in academic research. The reason for this is that it will help inform discussions during the analysis of the collected data.

One common approach when it comes to the categorisation of emotions in academic research, is discrete emotion theory. This is the idea that there are between seven to ten main emotions within which, there are multiple related words which are synonyms for these main seven to ten emotions. (Beck, 2003) Whilst there are some variations on the theory, the most agreed upon main categories of emotions are happiness, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, contempt and fear (Izard & Malatesta, 1987). It should be noted that the emotion of contempt is still an area of debate (see Matsumoto, 1992) and hence, it is Ekman's six core emotions that are most commonly used for classifying emotions (Ekman, 1972). Working off the notion that emotions have distinct categories,



Eugene Bann posited a theory that people in any given society use language as a means to transmit their understanding of emotions through the use of emotional keywords and that the more distinct language that is used the more distinct the perception of an audience to that emotion is (Bann & Bryson, 2013). Whilst Bann's theory is applicable to everyone in society, this theory is crucial to understanding how the manner in which a story is written about impacts how the public and hence public sphere is impacted.

One question that must be asked of this theory is how can a researcher differentiate between the several emotions? Ekman answered this question by proposing a set of criteria that each of the emotions must follow but in distinct ways for each emotion. Among his list of characteristics he believed could be found in every basic emotion were "can be brief in occurrence", "distinctive subjective experience" and "the emotion can be enacted in either a constructive or destructive fashion" (Ekman & Cordaro, 2011: 365). It is these characteristics that are likely to become salient in later discussions about the types of user engagement when it comes to YouTube videos.

Within the field of journalism, emotion can be seen to perform two broad purposes. The first is that it helps make news stories more intelligible. The second purpose is that it helps shape the way in which an audience receives the news (Pantti, 2010). In regards to making news stories more intelligible, this is often discussed in terms of identification, in that the audience identifies with emotions of those within the story, such as suffering or grief, and then form a connection between the story and their own lives through empathy (Grabe & Zhou, 2003). Regarding the way in which emotion shapes how the audience receives the news, it can be argued that journalism is about telling stories and that the emotions used in certain narrative structures helps to both "trigger and maintain the interest of the viewers." (Pantti, 2010: 177). Evidence for this can be seen in Wahl-Jorgensen's study in which a large number of stories that have won Pulitzer Prizes, thereby being deemed good and successful pieces of journalism, have relied "heavily on emotional story-telling, deploying what has been referred to as the strategic ritual of emotionality." (2012: 141). It can also be suggested here that the heavy utilisation of

emotion with award winning pieces of journalism may also be a contributing factor to the trend noted in the previous chapter towards an increase in stories relying less on objectivity and more on personalised styles of writing (Basu, 2010).

One way in which to look at how emotion operates within journalism is to see how it affects the main purposes of journalism itself. As briefly touched upon an earlier chapter, a basic but nevertheless useful definition of the purpose of journalism is to “provide citizens with the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, their communities, their societies, and their governments.” (American Press Institute, 2014). Put another way, journalism operates so as to inform the public sphere. But how does emotion help make an audience make better informed decisions?

The idea of emotions being utilised by a journalist as a means to better informing the public can be approached by looking at the concept of framing. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, framing is a “central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue” (Gamson, 1989: 157). An alternative interpretation of the term is provided by Entman (1993, 2004) who saw frames as a tool of communication in which decisions are made to select what information and how much salience is given to aspects of the information when crafting a message (Entman, 1993, 2004). Entman describes four locations of frame, these being the communicator, the text, the receiver's mind and culture (1993). These four locations of frame aim to serve four functions: “to state problems, determine causes, make moral judgements and suggest remedies. A frame may serve one or all of these functions.” (Jones & Himelboim, 2010: 278).

In journalism, frames are used to set the boundaries of public discussion around certain events through “persistent selection, emphasis and exclusion” (Gitlin, 1980: 7). Framing is arguably a necessary aspect in the production of news (see Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 1998) and its purpose is to help audiences comprehend what may otherwise be complex issues (Valkenburg et al, 1999). The reason for the use of framing from a practical standpoint is as Gan et al states, is “to simplify and give

meaning to events, and to maintain audience interest.” (2005: 442). There are a number of studies (Jones & Himelboim, 2010; Reese & Lewis, 2009; Gan et al, 2005) that present evidence that framing exists within newsrooms and the media in general. Studies on framing such as by Valkenburg et al (1999: 551) suggest that there are four ways in which an event can be framed:

(a) by emphasizing conflict between parties or individuals (conflict frame); (b) by focusing on an individual as an example or emphasizing emotions (human interest frame); (c) by attributing responsibility, crediting or blaming certain political institutions or individuals (responsibility frame); and (d) by focusing on the economic consequences for the audience (economic consequences frame).

The conflict frame aims to highlight divisions between parties or individuals and this is most notably seen during coverage of election campaigns as due to the nature of complex politics debates, conflict framing helps simplify the issues at hand (Patterson, 1993). It should be noted however that use of this frame is not limited to political coverage and that it predominantly makes winning/losing the main concern such as can be seen in the language used to describe wars or the style of an individual politician (Jamieson, 1992). The responsibility frame aims to focus attention on a specific issue in a way that imputes responsibility for either causing or solving a problem to a group or individual. (Valkenburg et al, 1999). An example of this given by Iyengar & Kinder (1989) is that of the issue of poverty in the United States where a poor mother on welfare benefits is responsible for her fate, rather than government. The economic consequences frame, frames issues in terms of the financial impact it could have on an individual or group of people. This can take the form of either actual or potential impact (Nueman et al, 1992). In both these cases, the frame can be seen to attempt to make an issue more relevant, certainly when covering macro-economic stories, to the audience. The human interest frame has the potential to contain the most emotive language as it aims to personalise and emotionalise an issue. As news markets become more competitive, outlets struggle to retain their audience’s interest (Bennett, 1995). By personalising an issue, the hope is to have an audience empathise with the

story and thereby retain interest. These four frames can all be generated through the use of pictures, sounds and text, the latter of which this study will pay particular attention to.

It should be noted that there is no definitive set of framing categories (Price et al, 1997) and that there are several proposed categories (Jamieson. K, 1992; Patterson. T, 1993; Price et al, 1997) as well as the ones described by Valkenburg et al (1999). As well as the dominant frames suggested above one could also argue that journalists can frame their stories in regards to their own region (Gan et al, 2005).

Before moving on to consider the impact that the employment of emotions within news frames can have, the way in which these frames are developed and reinforced over time should be considered. The reinforcement of news frames occurs due to the journalistic routines that are repeated by those working within the industry (Becker & Vlad, 2009: 59). The idea that journalists follow particular conventions in the production of a news story has promoted the argument that news is in fact a socially constructed reality and not a pure reflection of the events that are actually happening in the world (2009: 59). This argument is also reflected in the work of Stuart Hall (1982) that was mentioned in the beginning of chapter 1, where dominant groups with media institutions are able to determine what particular conventions in the production of news are followed.

Three paradigms Becker & Vlad (2009) suggest that are the lead contributors towards a journalistic routine are the political economy perspective, the sociological perspective and the constraints imposed by cultural considerations (2009: 60). The interaction between how money influences the news content produced, the background and life experiences of those working in the newsroom, and the cultural sensitivities of where the news is being made all factor into the final end product that is delivered to the public. These interactions take place within the structured nature of a newsroom wherein deadlines and editorial standards are handed out by those in management (Sparrow, 1999). These considerations can be linked to Joye et al (2016) work

discussed in the previous chapter wherein there are three levels of context when discussing the creation of news values. Sparrow's point above speaks to Joye et al's second level of context, the institutional level, whereas Becker and Vlad's point coincides with the third level of context, the societal level.

Due to their training, whether it be from university degree programmes or on the job internships, journalists have been deemed "professional gatekeepers, serving democratic society by shaping public conversations." (Agarwal & Barthel, 2013: 378). This, coupled with their position within an established news organisation "confirms their adherence to a set of widely-recognized procedures and ethics" (2013: 378). The journalistic routines and practices used in newsrooms are granted legitimacy from the relations that they have with credible sources that provide accurate information (Becker, 1967). A journalist's credibility then, is upheld through the continuation of the routines and practices used to establish said relationships.

It should be noted, as Agarwal & Barthel (2013) point out that due to the changing conditions of journalism, namely the rapid growth of online journalism in recent years, that "the professional routines of online journalism are thought to be significantly different from those of traditional print journalism." (2013: 379). Factors such as the increased speed of the news cycle (Deuze, 2004) and increased commercial pressures due to the reduction in advertising revenue (Cohen, 2002) have certainly had an impact on the political economy paradigm in relation to the established journalistic routines that had been used in traditional journalism formats such as print and TV. These are of course important points of consideration in regards to the research in this study as these factors are certainly applicable to the utilisation of YouTube as a news platform.

One must also consider how the growth of online journalism with which the debate over who can be considered a journalist (Lewis, 2012) has impacted on both the sociological perspective and cultural considerations that influence journalistic routines. However, regardless of what form the journalistic routines currently take, their existence and

thereby their role in how news stories get framed is still present in the news making process.

Remembering that journalism aims to help an audience make the best informed decisions that they can, framing takes a critical role in determining the impact of journalism and thereby the impact that emotions can have in journalism. This is because the language that is used in describing events is part of the process in creating a frame. The following section expatiates upon the idea that the use of language is integral to the notion of framing by discussing how the use of emotions within any given news frame can have an impact on the reception of the news story.

### **2.3: The impact of emotions**

There are several ways in which it can be argued that the use of emotions have an impact within the practice of journalism. One way would be to argue that due to its well-studied presence in the mass media in general (Schwab & Schwender, 2011) it must then also be present within the field of journalism. Another way would be to argue from an evolutionary standpoint in that there is a biological and social need to include emotions when trying to communicate information (ibid). However, this section intends to show that because emotions are utilised in the framing process, and that media frames have an impact on the way an audience receives a story, that therefore emotions ineluctably have an impact on the audience.

To show this link, one can look at past research on the various types of frame outlined by Valkenburg et al (1999). One such study is by Cappella & Jamieson (1996), which looked specifically at the use of the conflict frame. In their study, participants watched over 5 hours of televised news segments. One of the segments about the 1991 Philadelphia mayoral race was edited by the researchers. There were three groups of participants, one saw the news segment framed around problems and proposed solutions for the city. Another group saw the news segment which highlighted how a candidate's position on an issue either provided an advantage or not in securing votes.

The final group of participants saw the news segment which focussed on a local story which was not related to the mayoral elections. Cappella & Jamieson found that the group which saw the news segment utilising the conflict frame reported higher levels of cynicism than the other two groups of participants did about the mayoral campaign.

Another study that provides evidence towards the claim that framing has an impact on audiences, is by Iyengar (1989). In his paper, Iyengar argued that because television news has covered issues in terms of individual events rather than in terms of their historical context, that this has led people to individual level explanations for social problems such as poverty. The example given in the description of the responsibility frame above is a case of this happening.

A third study supporting the notion that frames influence an audience's reception of a story is by Price et al (1997). Rather than looking at individual frames, Price looked at the conflict, human interest and responsibility frames. Participants were students who were given a fictitious story about the funding of their own university. The students were randomly given different versions of the story where whilst the core information stayed the same, the opening and closing paragraphs differed in consonance with one of the three frames. After reading the story, the participants were asked to write down their feelings regarding the story. Price's results shows that each frame used elicited different responses from the participants both in terms of the focus of the topic as well as on the evaluation of the topic. Whilst this study provides strong evidence to the idea that frames influence an audience, there are some problems with the strength of the claims that can be made from this study. One problem is that the story that was given to the participants was fictional and was chosen because it was of high interest to the participants owing to the fact that they were all students. This raises the question of whether or not the study can be used for basing claims about real life stories. Another problem linked to the first is that the nature of the story chosen was highly relevant and salient to the participants. As Valkenburg et al point out, there is "still an open question as to whether the results can be generalised to issues of lower salience" (1999: 553).

To build upon and also counter the problems faced with Price et al's study, Valkenburg et al performed a more extensive study that looked at both whether or not use of particular frames influenced an audience's reception to a story, but also whether the use of frames affects an audience's ability to recall information about a story. To investigate the first claim Valkenburg et al gave participants one story about crime and another about the introduction of the Euro. Both stories were framed by one of the four dominate frames mentioned earlier. Results showed that participants who read a story that was using the human interest frame "emphasized emotions and individual implications". Participants who read a story that was using the conflict frame were "significantly more likely to express thoughts that involved conflict". Finally, participants who read a story that was using the economic consequences frame "focussed on costs and financial implications in their thoughts significantly more often" (1999: 565). When it came to investigating the impact that framing had on an audience's ability to recall information, Valkenburg et al found that for the Euro story, there was no distinguishable differences in recall ability amongst the different types of frame. However, for the crime story, participants who read the story with a human interest frame had worse recall than those who read the story with any of the other frames. This suggests that news stories that are subjected to a human interest frame, whilst making the story "more interesting and compelling, can diminish rather than enhance the recollection of information" (Valkenburg et al, 1995: 566). This suggestion supports findings by Mundorf et al, (1990) in which the ability of audiences to recall information in news stories is diminished if said news story is shown directly after a human interest story. It should be noted that the results from these two studies provide evidence against the argument put forward by earlier studies such as by Davis & Robinson (1986) which suggest that arousing strong emotions in an audience could help increase learning.

Overall, it would seem that there is significant evidence to suggest that the use of framing in news production can have an effect on an audience's thoughts about the issue in a news report, as well as their ability to recall it. As framing is used as a tool by journalists to give meaning to certain stories and that to give meaning to an issue requires the use of language beyond that of just stating the bare facts of a story, that



therefore, emotional language through the medium of framing has an impact on journalism.

Another way to look at how emotion has impacted journalism is to look at the language that is now used in reporting. As stated in the previous chapter, the notion of objectivity within journalism is a contentious one. Gruenfeld (1996) has argued that the editing of news reports is a subjective process by its very nature as it relies upon the sensibilities of the editor. Every word that is used, is a choice, either conscious or unconsciously made by the journalist. Language provides writers/speakers a choice and it is this fact that is the main driving force in the study of journalistic discourse in which the assumption that is made is that “linguistic choices in news discourse have consequences for the ways news consumers come to view a certain set of historical conditions” (Lukin, 2013: 98). The consequences can be seen through the studies on framing, but one still needs to look at the way language can be employed to utilise emotion.

At its very basic level it is the choices of words that are used to describe events. Words such as those used to describe Ekman's distinct categories like 'sadness' and 'anger', as well as words and subsequent synonyms in Scherer's Geneva Affect Label Coder (2005). However, as Wahl-Jorgensen (2013) points out, “emotions may also be built into the narrative: even in stories that do not use emotional language, dramatic tension is created through a variety of narrative strategies, including detailed description, juxtaposition and personalized story-telling” (2013: 135). Harbers & Broersma (2014), have provided examples of journalism that “show how overt subjectivity is displayed in different manners and how this affects the persuasiveness of reporting.”(2014: 639). An example within the study is how the award winning reporters Robert Fisk and Arnon Grunberg structure their stories chronologically and that through a gradual release of information, with attention given to “the atmosphere and the emotional impact of situations, they lend their senses to their readers” (Harbers & Broersma, 2014: 645). This particular example gives evidence towards the claim that the manner in which language is used and not just the language itself, has had an impact on journalism.

A further example highlighting how the language that is used in reporting has impacted journalism is the popularity of the tabloid press. Celebrity journalism, has constituted a large part of the tabloid press in Britain for many decades (Conboy, 2014). Within the tabloid newspapers, there is a sense of identity, in that there are a number of assumptions made about its intended audience. The language that is used to be geared towards such an audience has been called an exercise in audience design (Bell, 1984). By creating an identity, it has been argued that it is the language that is used by newspapers, rather than their layout, that distinguishes between the “neutral language of those aiming to be considered as serious newspapers or record and the 'emotionally charged' language of the popular tabloids” (Kitis & Milapedes, 1997: 562). Tabloid newspapers can be seen to have been impacted by the use of emotive language as it has allowed them to create an identity or brand around their outlet. It should also be noted that the language identity formed can be viewed as a way in which to create a vocabulary for their imagined average reader or as Conboy puts it, as a “sort of vernacular ventriloquism” (2002: 162). Evidence to support the idea that there is a formation of this vernacular ventriloquism is provided by Molek-Kozakowska, in which headlines used by the Daily Mail Online, use semantic structures and narrative formulas to package its content for their intended audience (Molek-Kozakowska, 2013). The notion of using language as part of a news outlet's identity is one that will be expanded upon in the next chapter. Finally, it should be noted that most of the studies and other literature discussed above is often based or focussed upon print or traditional broadcast journalism.

## **2.4: Conclusion**

In summation, this chapter has explored how emotion as a concept within the field of journalism has developed from being viewed as something that was antithetical to the practice of journalism due to its contrast with the assumed ideal of objectivity, towards something that can be seen as a vital element within various areas of journalism. A

clear way in which emotions can be seen to enter into a news story is through the manner in which they are framed.

This chapter attempts to highlight how frames such as the conflict frame or human interest frame develop as part of the journalistic process and that the routines commonly adhered to by journalists, due to their credibility granting nature, allow such frames and thereby emotions to enter into news stories.

The debate around whether the use of emotion in journalism is a good or bad thing is acknowledged but it is contended that that is the wrong way to phrase the issue. Pantti (2010) suggests that a better way of considering the issue is “whether journalism uses emotions to make the story more attractive or uses emotions to evoke feeling and get better ratings” (2010: 177). Regardless of the benefits or downsides of employing emotion within journalism, this chapter does argue that the presence of emotion does at least impact journalism and most notably in two key ways.

Firstly, it has allowed for the development of different types of journalism by enabling different styles of reporting as well as allowing these styles to help create a news outlet’s sense of identity. The notion of newsroom identities being something that will be explored in subsequent chapters. The second key way emotion has impacted journalism is that it affects how an audience interprets the news as well as their ability to recall the news, through the utilisation of emotional language through framing.

Overall, the literature discussed in this chapter is important to the focus of this thesis for several reasons. The first is that it highlights how much existing research between emotions and journalism has been focussed on traditional news platforms and has neglected newer platforms. Secondly, this chapter provides context as to why it is important to understand the role that emotions play in the reporting of news due to the impact it can have on an audience. This opens the way for discussion during the analysis chapters regarding whether or not the use of emotions in framing a story make a positive or negative contribution towards the public sphere as if the employment of

emotions compels members of the public to engage with the story in some way, then this could be seen, at least on face value, as beneficial to the public sphere.

## **CHAPTER 3: The news landscape, consumption trends and clickbait**

Television as a medium through which news can be delivered has been heavily studied through a wide range of viewpoints. Its transformative nature regarding a society's culture (Fiske, 1987), its influence on people's patterns of behaviour (Meyrowitz, 1987) and its gradual commoditization (Crissell, 2006), are just a small illustration of existing scholarly work. However, due to advances in technology, there has been a shift in the news consumption habits of people, particularly younger people. Given these changes, the purpose of this chapter is to set out how the format of news content has changed over time and how the evolution in the style that news is presented can play a role in both the production and consumption of news content. This will be done with reference to the concept of polarization within the media and how a shift away from some of the ideals of the journalistic ideology outlined in chapter 1 has benefited some within the media.

A second aim of this chapter is to provide greater context around the role that the platform YouTube plays within the media ecosystem. This will be done by discussing the concepts of media hybridization and media convergence. The purpose of this will be to explore how journalistic institutions have adapted to both changes in technology and in society. Finally, this chapter will outline some of the existing literature on YouTube so as to help better situate this study within the field of communications research.

Before proceeding with these discussions, it is prudent to first provide the cultural context in which these discussions are situated given the largely Western nature of the institutions and audiences that are under review for this study.

### **3.1: Changes in news consumption**

As technologies have progressed, the number of ways the public can consume news has increased. As high speed internet has become easier to access in the last decade in America, more and more people are able to seek out information online. In 2013,

50% of the American public cited the internet as their main source for both national and international news (Caumont, 2013), with it having overtaken radio back in 2003 and newspapers in 2008. When looking at younger demographics the percentage is even higher. Amongst 18-29 year olds, 71% say the internet is their main source of news, 16% higher than TV. Amongst 30-49 year olds, both the internet and TV are on 63% (Caumont, 2013). These two demographic groups are important as these are the ones most targeted by advertisers and hence, are thereby the ones most sought after when it comes to audiences. Social media is also playing a larger role. The percent of the public that ever sees news on social networking sites had increased from 29% in 2010, to 47% in 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2012: 10). The growth of mobile technology has also had an impact on the way people consume news, with 78% reporting that they have used their smartphone to get news within the last week (American Press Institute, 2014). Part of the growth in smartphone usage to consume news has been argued to be because it exploits gaps during the daily routine of most people where it had previously been unfeasible to access the news (Dimmick, Feaster & Hoplamazian, 2010). In terms of dedicated news websites, the total traffic for the top 25 news sites increased by 7.2% in 2012 (Pew Research Center, 2013). Of the major cable news network's websites, CNN was the most used as a news source at 14% whereas Fox was at 9% and MSNBC 6% (Pew Research Center, 2012: 19). Whilst the statistics cited above are from an American context, similar trends regarding news consumption and use of the internet has been seen across many other Western countries (see Fisher et al, 2019; OFCOM, 2019)

Other important trends regarding online news is that of advertising. This is an important trend to consider given the previous discussions about how the growth of advertising and commercialisation has been seen as detrimental towards the public sphere. In 2012 digital advertising grew 17% to just over \$37 billion and mobile adverts increased by 80% (Pew Research Center, 2013). Whilst not all of this is geared towards news sites, native advertising, which is where an advert is designed to appear like natural content, increased by 56.1% in 2011 and 38.9% in 2012. News websites such as Forbes,

BuzzFeed and the Huffington Post have begun to more frequently use such advertising to boost revenue.

A further trend to note that is of particular importance to this thesis, is that of news video consumption online. Between 2012 and 2014, Americans have increased their total online video consumption from 13 minutes to 27 minutes a day (Bilton, 2014). Currently 63% of Americans watch online video, with 36% watching news videos (Olmstead et al., 2014). Also, when demographics are considered, the most sought after age group, 18-29, has 48% of its group consuming online news videos. Considering the fact that most of the largest video hosting sites such as YouTube and Vimeo were founded in 2005 and 2004 respectively, the growth in this method of news consumption is something to take note of.

At first glance, it would appear that the numbers suggest that more and more people are choosing the internet as their source of news information. However, it is not just a simple case of people leaving traditional news sources in favour of more modern ones. Ahler (2006) has made the claim that the internet is not acting as a substitute, but rather as a compliment to other news sources. From his study, he concluded that the “migration of consumers from the traditional news media to the online news media has not happened. At least it has not happened to a magnitude that could be characterized as the collapsing of the traditional news media” (2006: 48). However, this study was conducted in 2006 and due to the fast paced evolution of technology and other factors, this study's claim could now be deemed in question. In 2013, 31% of Americans said that they have abandoned a particular news outlet because it no longer provided what they were looking for (Edna & Mitchell, 2013).

One of the theorized ideas behind this shift towards more digital consumption is that online, there is more of an ability to personalize the news content that one receives. Personalization as defined by Thurman is “a form of user-to-system interactivity that uses a set of technological features to adapt the content, delivery and arrangement of a communication to individual users' explicitly registered and/or implicitly determined

preferences” (2011: 397). This takes the form of being able to subscribe to different channels on sites such as YouTube, or being able to choose a geographically relevant edition of a news website such as the Huffington Post. With news providers giving more ways to personalize an individual's news intake (Thurman, 2011), this links back to the idea that people will seek out news that reinforces their own beliefs (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; 2010). The ability for audiences to choose what sort of news they wish to consume can be seen as linking with the concept of news values discussed in chapter 1, particularly in regards to Harcup & O’Neill’s value of ‘relevance’ which suggested that stories about issues, groups and nations were deemed to be of more value relevant to the audience. (2001: 278–279).

A further point to make about shifting news consumption habits is how it affects the industry. With newspapers seeing a continuing fall in revenues and the overall workforce declining (Edmonds et al., 2013), more resources and journalists are being shifted into native digital news organizations. Websites such as BuzzFeed have increased their editorial employees from a handful to now over 170 (Jurkowitz, 2014). Local TV news websites have begun to embrace online video technology, with the majority of them having videos on their homepage and the ability to live stream their own YouTube channel (Olmstead et al., 2014). Whilst greater diversity and choice in the ways in which news can be consumed, as well as the outlets from which to consume from is on face value a good thing, there are some problems that the current trends can cause. Newspaper newsrooms are also changing with the number of editors saying that their duties in regards to videography and web-only editing increasing by 63% and 57% respectively in 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2008). Before discussing what the adoption of digital platforms has meant in regards to the academic approach to communication studies, it is first important to note how there are some unique aspects to digital media. Ones which afford journalistic institutions more issue to consider in the news making process as well as new lines of enquiry for researchers to pursue.

The growth of online media has allowed a new level of information when it comes to measuring how people consume their news. Metrics such as the total number of



individual people who visit a site, what articles or videos that they choose to look at and how long they spend on them can now all be measured (Deuze, 2003; Domingo, 2008). This is a noteworthy concept as previously in the age of just print and broadcast news, the ways in which news organisations could measure how the public use their product was limited to very obtuse ways such as the total number of newspapers sold or people watching a particular TV broadcast. Without the employment of researchers, news organisations had limited knowledge regarding how long a consumer spent on each individual article or whether they watched the entire broadcast or just the first 5 minutes. However, online media allows for far greater depth in understanding regarding trends in news consumption for news organisations. With the consumption of online news becoming ever more important (Newman, Dutton & Blank, 2012) due to its reach, the way these metrics are used can become of great importance. The reason being is that news outlets and their editors may begin to focus on articles or videos that will improve the metrics of their site, rather than focus on articles or videos that are more newsworthy. This shift is in essence a shift towards the news value of “audience targeting” that is proposed by Machin & Niblock (2006: 141), discussed in chapter 1.

Shoemaker & Vos make the point that “hard data about what readers want to read butts up against the social responsibility canon to give readers what they need to read” (2009: 7). With metrics being an indicator of a successful article or video, at least in terms of financial value, there is an arguable incentive for news sites to follow the audience and give them more of what they want (Bright & Nicholls, 2014). In their study to see whether or not the metrics of an article influenced the likelihood of it being removed from a websites front page, Bright & Nicholls found that “being a most read article decreased the short-term likelihood of being removed from the front page by around 25%” (2014: 170). This could have implications towards to role of online news audiences as those who more frequently visit a news site could influence which stories remain on the front page for viewers who less frequently visit a site.

Another change to point out that has happened in the industry is the growth of clickbait. Clickbait is where the link to an article or video has a headline that encourages people

to click on it to see more by withholding crucial parts of information from the headline. The employment of clickbait headlines help drive traffic towards certain articles and it is commonly seen to be used for entertainment stories or soft news stories, rather than hard news stories. As mentioned above, this could be of importance as if soft news stories garner better metrics on a website, it may influence whether or not its visitors see other more newsworthy stories. Research by Ng & Zhao (2018) suggests that the employment of sensationalist headlines, invokes a type of human alarm system which is designed to make people pay attention to potentially threatening news such as natural disaster and thus is an effective method of getting the public to pay attention to a story. One metric used to measure the success of a piece of online content is the number of shares it gets and as Sambrook states, “sharing rewards sensation over authority, and encourages the clickbait online economy where it doesn’t matter if something is true or not, just as long as you click on it and advertisers can ride on the back of your curiosity.” (2017: 16).

The relationship between the number of clicks a news article receives and the public’s actual interest in the story has been called into question by Kormelink & Meijer (2017). Through qualitative analysis of 56 participants, they contend that the term ‘interest’ is too crude a term to use in regards to why someone does or does not click on a news story link. They believe that there are a multitude of considerations ranging from cognitive, to affective, to pragmatic considerations that go into a users’ decision to click a news link (2017: 13). This is not to say that clickbait economy is therefore misunderstood. As Kormelink & Meijer state, their “argument is not that clicks are meaningless, they just capture a limited range of users’ interests or preferences.” (2017: 14). They go on to suggest that whilst clicks are limited in their ability to capture of sense of users’ preference, other metrics that measure forms of user engagement may be more useful to academics and newsrooms alike as “they capture a broader array of digital user practices than only clicking.” (2017: 14).

Given all of the changes to the media ecosystem outlined thus far, one can now consider the question as to how the media has adapted and, in some instances,

enhanced these changes. One way of approaching this question is by discussing the concepts of media hybridization and convergence.

### **3.2 Media hybridization and convergence.**

Chadwick, Dennis & Smith (2016: 10) defined a hybrid media system as one where interactions between:

“Older and newer media logics—where logics are defined as bundles of technologies, genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms—in the reflexively connected social fields of media and politics. Actors in this system are articulated by complex and ever-evolving relationships based upon adaptation and interdependence and concentrations and diffusions of power. Actors create, tap, or steer information flows in ways that suit their goals and in ways that” modify, enable, or disable others’ agency, across and between a range of older and newer media settings.”

It can be said that today’s society has a hybrid media system as the interactions between old media logics and new media logics and be clearly seen. However, whilst it may be easier to spot the hybridization of media in the digital age, with examples such as how both CNN and YouTube jointly hosted a presidential debate in 2008, given by Chadwick et al (2016), the actual process is one that Chadwick argues began in the 15th Century (Chadwick, 2013).

The concept of ‘new media’ has always been presented as an improvement on the existing method of delivering information. Chadwick gives the example of how the Gutenberg press, “made use of the conventions of the handwritten manuscript, but improved the handling of ink to enhance the legibility of texts” (2013: 24). Similar points can be made regarding the introduction of technologies like radio, television and the internet. However, it is not the case that there is a clear leap from one new media to the next. Fidler (cited in Chadwick, 2013: 24) uses the term ‘mediamorphosis’ wherein there

is a “continuum of transformations and adaptations...brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive and political pressures, and social and technological innovations”. This is a key point as it illustrates how new media technologies are influenced by older media and thus, how these new media are used by both news producers and consumers. An example of how older media influences newer media can be seen in the close resemblance that news websites have to traditional print media. The positioning of elements such as the headline and by-line on news websites, along with how the genre of stories are segmented into their own categories such as ‘sports’ can be seen to have been influenced by how traditional print media conducted its work.

One of the factors at play in the hybridization of the media is the gradual legitimization of the new media. Whilst Chadwick (2013) gives historical examples such as the use of electronic media during the early part of the 20th Century being legitimized by their use from professional elites in society, contemporary examples such as the legitimization of platforms like Twitter through their use by politicians (Karlsen. & Enjolras, 2016) shows that the hybridization of the media has been an ongoing process.

Whilst the media system is under continuous evolution, with new platforms and news organisations being created, one of the key aspects of this process is how existing, established organisations and individuals navigate this process. Chadwick (2013: 53), suggests that established organisations, both in print and television, have maintained their dominance within the media ecosystem, at least in the context of domestic election campaign news. Based on data from Pew Research (cited in Chadwick, 2013: 54) he contends that “first, older media in general have adapted and are now powerful players in online news; and second, American citizens increasingly use digital media to engage with campaign content that has originated in some way with television.” This second point is particularly relevant to this study and raises the of cross pollination in regards to how in the digital age, content on one platform is often repurposed for another.

This term 'cross pollination' was coined by Jain et al (2013) and was directed towards the idea that content on one social media platform would inevitably be shared on other social media platforms. In their study they looked at how content from social media platforms, YouTube being one of them, diffused onto Twitter. They found that the popularity of content on one platform, did not dictate that it would also be popular on Twitter. Nonetheless, it could be argued that there is in fact cross pollination between social media platforms and traditional media platforms like TV. This is exemplified by TV news networks posting their TV content on social media platforms such as YouTube and also further exemplifies the hybridization of our media systems. Whilst some of the reasons for TV networks to do this are obvious, such as increased potential audience and increased potential revenue streams, another less obvious reasons lies in the idea of brand loyalty and trust in news organisations.

This combination of old and new media raises the concept of media convergence. According to Jenkins (2004), convergence is a process where there is an alteration of "the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences." (Ibid: 34). What is important to note is that media convergence is not merely a shift in how technologies are used in the production of news, but is also concerned with changes in cultural consumption (Garcia Canclini, 2008). Jenkins gives the example of mobile phones which are now not simply just communication devices but "allow us to play games, download information from the internet and receive and send photographs or text messages." (2004: 34), whereas Maxwell & Miller state that since the 1940s Hollywood has "produced actors and audiences alike accustomed to media convergence. Both groups routinely moved between radio, cinema and television, respectively leaving and deducing intertextual traces as they did so" (2011: 591-592). What these two examples illustrate, is that the process of media convergence is occurring on multiple levels within the media ecosystem.

The driving force behind media convergence can be seen to be happening at both the production and consumption ends of the media system. As Jenkins puts it, "Convergence is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-

driven process.” (2004: 37). Media organisations are seeking to broaden the opportunities for their content to be consumed, thereby reinforcing branding and financial opportunities, whereas public is aiming to gain greater control over the type of media that they consume. An example of this in action is seen in research by Chadwick, O’Loughlin & Vaccari (2017) who looked at the use of dual-screening when watching televised political debates. The use of social media whilst watching televised content “can lead to positive outcomes for democratic engagement beyond those who are political “junkies”” (Ibid: 235). Media organisations are able to engage with the same audience across multiple platforms whereas at the same time, audiences are able to exert greater levels of political agency regarding their engagement with news content. An important consideration when it comes to media convergence is the impact that it has on news production within already established newsrooms. García Avilés et al (2009) have proposed that there are three models as to how convergence occurs in a newsroom: full integration, cross-media and co-ordination of isolated platforms. Each of these models entail different organisational structures and different work routines for the journalists involved. With García Avilés et al suggesting that the isolation model is not “forward looking” and “economically unsustainable” (2009: 300), the full integration model where multi-platform production is combined in a single newsroom, and the cross-media model where more than one media platform is simultaneously engaged in creating content, are suggested to be the most likely forms of newsroom organisation.

The result of content being produced to be used on multiple platforms leads to a worry put forward by Owen in that “Television sets, tele-phones, and computers (and the networks that bind them) are or will become the same” (1999: 16). Alongside the concern that more skills and work are expected of individual journalists by their newsrooms (Wallace, 2013), there is also a concern that media convergence can lead to a uniformity of content within the media industry (Benedik, 2003; Boczkowski, 2005; Erdal, 2009). Whilst this concern may have not been as substantial in the late part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century where media convergence could be seen as being limited to the merging of newspapers and TV stations such as where the purchasing of the LA Times by Tribune Co. who owned several TV stations in 2000, enabled newspaper reporters to appear on

television whilst TV reporters could write stories for the newspaper (Jin 2013), the growth of social media and other digital platforms potentially exacerbates the uniformity of content concern. As Negroponte has said, “When all media is digital . . . bits commingle effortlessly” (1996: 18) and this would suggest why many newsrooms have adopted platforms such as YouTube, due to the ease of which content they were already producing, could be repurposed to reach different audiences.

Chadwick, O’Loughlin & Vaccari’s (2017) study on the use of dual-screening also highlighted a point made by Jenkins in that media convergence forces news organisations to rethink their own assumptions about how audiences consume media (2004: 37). The assumptions that audiences were passive, predictable and isolated individuals are changing to ones where the audience is more socially connected, more migratory and more active in taking the media into their own hands. It is partly for these reasons that this study views it as important to look at how new media platforms like YouTube are being used by both news organisations and audiences alike.

A further reason stems from the decline of the public’s trust in the news media over the past few years, which has been well documented (Pew Research Center, 2018) with only 21% of Americans having “a lot of trust” in national news organisations (ibid: 17). This combined with the shifting news consumption trends detailed earlier could lead one to believe that there may be some irony in the notion that more people are getting their news online despite the fact that online news media is seen as less credible than TV news media (Blöbaum, 2014: 40). However, due to the cross pollination of content within the hybrid media system many people may be engaging with news content that they are more familiar with and find more credible. However, with the trust of TV news brands such as CNN scoring higher levels of trust than digital news brands (Kalogeropoulos & Fletcher, 2018) one could argue that whilst the platform from which people are consuming the news may be changing, the actual content they are consuming is remaining somewhat the same. In essence, whereas people used to watch segments of news on TV, they are now watching those same segments but on digital platforms like YouTube. It is for this reason why this thesis considers it important

to look at the content of digitally native news networks like The Young Turks, so as to be able to make comparisons between digitally native content and content that has been cross pollinated from other platforms.

### **3.3: YouTube's role in the media ecosystem**

As discussed in the previous section, the development of new technologies often coincides with the creation of new “genres, norms, behaviors, and organizational forms” (Chadwick, Dennis & Smith 2016: 10). The speed of these changes is dependent upon many factors such as the technologies availability to the public, its legitimization by its initial uses and how, if at all, it is adopted by existing media organisations. This has certainly been the case with YouTube, which since its creation in 2005 has seen its role within the media ecosystem evolve as the aforementioned changes have occurred.

YouTube's perceived role within the media ecosystem is reflected in early academic research on the platform, which saw it as something that was taking eyeballs away from newspapers and news websites (Moore, 2006), a space simply for sharing content (Bachmair & Bazalgette, 2007) and also as a picture source for traditional news channels (Loyn, 2007). These early works on YouTube can be seen as a product of their time in that the scope, utility and power of the platform had not been fully realised. This is to be expected with any new media platform that after a few years after its initial inception, go on to become vastly popular. Both the public and academic attitude to mediums such as television and radio developed overtime, and this is certainly the case with YouTube.

One way to consider the role that YouTube plays is through its relationship with the concept of the public sphere. When taking Habermas' definition of the public sphere (1964: 49), Burgess & Green (2009, 77) have argued that YouTube is a “cultural public sphere” because “it is an enabler of encounters with cultural differences and the development of political ‘listening’ across belief systems and identities”. What is being argued here is could be argued as also being applicable for other media technologies



such as television. If it were the case that YouTube was merely duplicate form of television, affording all the same benefits to the public sphere as traditional TV, then not only would much research on YouTube be indistinguishable from traditional TV research, it would also suggest that the process of media hybridization is absent or minimal at best when it comes to the platform of YouTube. This however is not the case as there are many unique qualities to YouTube that by their simple presence, alter the way in which YouTube impacts the public sphere.

An alternative way to consider YouTube's role in the media ecosystem is by discussing how the new media logic that it brings with it, influences the norms and behaviours of older media logics. Given that the news media want their content to reach the greatest audience possible, one can consider the premise that traditional news organisations may alter the style or format of their content so that it better suits new media platforms like YouTube. Bishop (2018) makes the case through the example of fashion vloggers, that for women on YouTube, the platform "privileges and rewards feminized content deeply entwined with consumption, beauty, fashion, baking, friendships and boyfriends in the vein of the historical bedroom culture of the teenage magazine." (Ibid: 69). With news organisations wanting to expand their audience, if certain styles of presenting the news, or discussing a particular topic thrive on YouTube, a suggestion could be made that in the future there may be evidence showing that traditional media platforms like cable news, adopt aspects of YouTube's media logic and alter their content in terms of style and format knowing that doing so will better serve the content in terms of reaching a larger audience. There is already some evidence to suggest that social media platforms have influenced the format of how news is presented by traditional news organisations. Research by Welbers & Opgenhaffen (2019) concluded that there is a "shift towards a more subjective and positive style of communication of journalists on social media" (Ibid: 58).

Another one of the distinct features that YouTube has is the ability for audiences to engage with the news content they are consuming. As there is a desire by academia, government and businesses to understand the public's opinion on a wide range of topics (Thelwall, 2017), it is important to explore how YouTube enables greater levels of understanding through its mechanisms of user engagement.

### **3.4: User engagement**

Past scholarly work on the concepts of the media and user engagement have taken a number of different interpretations of these two terms. With traditional visual media platforms such as television, the notion of engagement is often to do with something external to the media platform itself. Examples of this include how television influences an audience's civic or political engagement in society (Hooghe, 2002), how television stations interact with and perceive user generated content (Collistra et al, 2016) and how individuals appearing on television can engage with an audience so as to hold their interest (Parkin, 2009). These forms of engagement can be seen as external as the viewer is not directly engaging with the content being presented to them. The research discussed in this section deals with the concept of user engagement in a manner which views user engagement as being a direct interaction with the platform and content at hand, namely YouTube videos.

The capacity for direct engagement with news content is one of the unique and defining features of online news, particularly with more social platforms such as YouTube. It has been argued that "to engage is a new value, but not really a news value. This focus on the quality of interaction heralds change" (MacGregor, 2007: 293). From this, an idea that can be posited is that the success of a news video not only lies in its journalistic quality or adherence to journalistic news values, but now in the social media age, also on its ability to engage with its audience. The reason why it is increasingly important to study this area is that the idea of audience engagement has steadily become an attractive feature to marketers and advertisers and as Ksiazek et al states "with the challenges facing many news organizations, the ability of journalists to offer engaging

content to attract, or “pull,” users would seem to be more important than ever.” (2014: 503). This argument also contributes to the idea that digital news platforms are beneficial to the public sphere in that not only are they acting as disseminators of information so that the public can make better informed decisions about their lives, but also that it provides a platform on which they can discuss this information help themselves and others better understand the information they have been given, all of which being components of Habermas’s concept of the public sphere. This idea is supported by Boulianne’s meta-analysis of research investigating the role the internet has on civic life in which there is “strong evidence against the Internet having a negative effect on engagement.” (2009: 193).

It should be noted that direct engagement with news content does not necessarily imply that there are tangible benefits that can be measured in society. Simply liking or commenting on a video in no way means that the public sphere has been improved in any way. One term that encapsulates this notion is slacktivism. Morozov (2009) defines slacktivism as an “apt term to describe feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact.”. Whilst the negative connotations of the term have spread through both academic and activist circles James Dennis (2016) has argued that social media platforms “create new opportunities for cognitive engagement, discursive participation, and political mobilisation” (ibid: 261). The idea that simply clicking online has no impact when it comes to social change is rebutted by Dennis where he suggests that “member-led, hybrid mobilization movements use social networking sites to provide a variety of substantive ways in which members can both shape and take part in campaigns.” (ibid: 265). Although one could argue that there is a nuanced difference between liking or commenting on a news video on YouTube and liking or commenting on a Facebook post of an activist/campaigning group page, one can still contend that both actions are at least some form of engagement with civically important affairs and thus are actions that contribute towards the public sphere.

Whilst the idea of direct engagement with news content may be a unique feature of online news platforms, engagement, or sometimes referred to as participation, in a more

general sense has existed for some time. The fact that Habermas' definition of the public sphere invokes notions of public participation in the opinion forming process, shows how the interaction between news media producers and consumers is a crucial part of any democratic society. The ability to take an active role in the news making process, or acts of citizen journalism (Allan & Thorsen, 2009) have been studied a significant amount in recent years. Studies looking at the audience engaging with the news in this manner have considered the problems around maintaining objectivity (Blaagaard, 2013), its potential democratizing effect (Meadows, 2012) amongst many other issues. But whilst the academic literature on the impact of the relationship between audience and news production is extensive, there has not been as much focus on how news content may impact the way in which the audience engages with and feedbacks on that content, specifically when it comes to platforms such as YouTube. There are suggestions that "spaces like YouTube lend themselves more readily to 'agonistic' models of civility, which prioritize engagement over restraint and embrace conflict without violence (physical or symbolic), and which account for the ludic and carnivalesque dimensions of new digital environments." (Goode & McKee, 2013: 115). This notion of YouTube being a platform that embraces conflict could be seen as a result of media hybridization wherein norms and behaviours from old media logics have transferred across to this new media platform and then matured and cultivated further. The origins of this will be explored later in this chapter.

### **3.5: The content of user comments**

Beginning with the content of the comments themselves, there are a number of factors to consider when discussing studies looking at the consistency of online user comments. The first is scope of the study as in whether or not it is looking at comment sections about one particular subject or if it looks at comments written about a broad range of subjects. Two studies that highlight this difference are by Santana (2015) and Kwon & Cho (2015). Kwon & Cho's study looked at comments written across 26 news websites in South Korea and examined the difference in comments between articles of political and nonpolitical nature. This can be seen as a broad based approach to

studying online comments. Santana's study on the other hand focused on news stories that dealt with issues around immigration from 3 websites. The reason for highlighting these two types of approach to comment sections is to underscore the point that breadth of content being looked at in a study affects the range of conclusions that can be drawn. A study such as that by Madden et al. (2013), which sought to categorize the types of comments found on YouTube videos can be deemed as taking a broad approach to studying online comments as it looked at comments across a range of types of YouTube video and because of this Madden et al were able to posit that there are "ten broad categories, and 58 subcategories which reflect the wide-ranging use of the YouTube comments facility." (2013: 693). This sort of finding has more general use from which other studies can build upon whereas narrower studies like Santana's (2015) limit research wishing to build upon it by having to either focus on another individual issue or on the same issue but on a different platform or from different sources. Previous chapters looked at comments in a broad sense in that they were looked at in a quantitative manner such as how various factors influenced the total number of comments on a video. However as this chapter is focusing on a small number of videos the conclusions that are likely to be drawn will be more nuanced and narrower in nature such as those by Santana.

A second factor to consider when looking at other research conducted on online user comments is whether or not they look at comments in a direct communicative sense. What is meant by this is whether or not each comment is viewed as being simply a direct communication between the user and the video content, or whether it is viewed as being part of a larger ecosystem of comments where they interact with one another. A study that illustrates the direct sense approach is by Tenenboim & Cohen (2013) which looked at the relationship the number of clicks an article received against the number of user comments written on each article. Their study simply looked at the raw number of user comments written. A more complex theoretical framework for studying user comments is put forward by Ksiazek et al (2014) in which a distinction is made between user-content comments and user-user comments. User-content interactivity is defined as "a user interacting with content and producers, such as posting an initial

comment to a video thread” whereas user-user interactivity is seen as “interactions among two or more users, such as a user replying to another comment already posted on the video thread by a different user.” (2014: 505). From the content producer's standpoint these two types of comments provide two different types of feedback. The former can be viewed as feedback directed towards the content producers whereas the latter provides a representative view of the conversation or debate between the commenters and ties in more closely with notions around the public sphere.

A third factor to consider is the nature of the comments themselves. There is a common perception that online comment sections are, or have the potential to become, very toxic in nature (Salter, 2017; Braithwaite, 2013). Toxicity online can be interpreted in a number of ways but it is commonly thought of in terms of an individual being toxic through their use of coarse or inflammatory language. When multiple toxic individuals interact within the same space, whether this is on an individual article or an entire forum, the environment of said article or video is said to be toxic. Having a toxic environment is something that news organisations and media platforms wish to avoid as toxic environments are not welcoming or appealing to the general public and this hurts their brand. Trying to keep comment sections benign or constructive in nature is a goal that most media platforms aim to achieve. This is evidenced in a number of ways. Firstly many large news websites employ comment section moderators to in effect police what users are writing. Secondly, when the reputation of an online comment platform becomes toxic, the platform often tries to rectify this. An example of this is highlighted in Massanari's (2015) study of Reddit.com which had become known as a hub for what she described as anti-feminist “toxic technocultures” such as Gamergate and The Fappening. Her study notes that during the research for it, Reddit.com introduced new policies that discouraged harassment and other toxic behaviours on its website. A final way that online platforms try to stem toxic environments from developing is by simply denying users the ability to comment. Examples of this include Reddit.com shutting down entire forums on the site that were deemed too toxic (Bell, 2017) and also various YouTube channels denying users the ability to comment on either certain, or all videos uploaded on a channel (Jaworski, 2014).

Having a precise definition of what constitutes a toxic comment is difficult to pin down as often it is subjective in nature and open to interpretation. However, toxicity or at least elements of it are not always a bad thing when it comes to developing the public sphere or furthering discussions around a particular topic. The use of coarse language, particularly swearing can have positive effects. The study by Kwon & Cho (2015) mentioned earlier, whilst looking at comments across a broad range of news websites, was specifically looking at the effect swearing had on user-user comments on news articles. Their findings were suggestive towards “positive effects of swearing on increasing the public’s attention and perception toward the comments” (2015: 99) and that “an acceptable degree of swearing norms in online discussions vary across news topical arenas.” (2015: 84). One of the ways to illuminate why there are toxic environments online is to consider who is actually writing the toxic comments in the first place and why.

### **3.6: Who writes the comments and why?**

Commenting on online content is one of the most popular ways in which the public can participate and interact with the news. However, questions arise around who is actually writing the comments under news articles and YouTube videos and what is prompting them to do so. Wu & Atkin (2016) studied the personality traits of individuals to see what sort of person is more likely to comment on online news. They found that those who had more agreeable and narcissistic personalities were more motivated to write online comments. The motivations for commenting ranged from “informing, getting feedback and exhibitionism” (2016: 61). As well as personal factors that cause a person to comment, there are also factors that can be attributed to the content that the comments are being written about. Weber’s (2013) study hypothesized that the news factors, these being one based on Galtung & Ruge’s theory of newsworthiness, would influence the amount of participation in regards to comments on a news story. He found that “news factors contribute to explaining the number of readers who post at least one comment and to explaining the average number of comments posted per commentator.” (2013:

952). The 4 factors Weber highlights as contributing towards the likelihood of a user commenting on a story were proximity, impact, continuity and facticity. The factor of facticity is worth highlighting for this study's purpose due to the nature of content that is being looked at. Many of the YouTube videos in the data sample, most notably those from TYT, contain as Weber puts it, "analysis and journalistic appraisals of a news event (and thereby being low in facticity)" (2013: 952). The dialogic nature of a video would according to Weber, increase the likelihood of a user writing a comment.

Whilst not everyone who uses the internet as a news source will write a comment, studies suggest around 30% of users do (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2013; Goodier, 2012). A key note to these studies is that they are several years old and with the consistent rise of mobile internet technology, websites like Reddit.com and traditional news organisations adopting online comment section policies to encourage engagement, the proportion of people commenting on news stories has likely increased. Surveys have shown that men are more likely to comment on news stories than women (Meyer & Carey, 2015) and this does link back to Massanari's study mentioned earlier where anti-feminism tends to be one of the more prominent toxic subcultures in comment forums. Trying to research precise demographics when it comes to who writes comments on news articles often comes across one main problem. Many news websites and social media platforms allow a large degree of anonymity.

Within academia there is an ongoing debate around whether anonymity is an overall net positive when it comes to online communication. The assumption that is often held is that a platform that allows users to remain anonymous helps promote toxic behaviours such as aggression and violence due to the perceived lack of consequences. Whilst there is research that supports this claim (Zimbardo, 1969; Suler, 2005), there is also other work that goes some way to countering it such as by Rost, Stahel & Frey (2016), which found that users who were open about their identity were more likely to be aggressive online than their anonymous counterparts. The benefits of anonymity have also been well documented in scholarly research. As well as potentially promoting positive behaviours such as intimacy and openness, (Peddinti et al., 2014; Zhang &



Kizilcec, 2014), anonymity allows for identity exploration (Graafland, 2018) as well as encouraging participation (Kasakowskij et al., 2018). This final benefit is a critical one given the context of news content on a platform like YouTube. Kasakowskij et al's study makes the distinction between anonymous and non-anonymous platforms wherein the latter has users that "are clearly identifiable by their real name or pseudonym" (2018: 27), which YouTube would fall under. The study goes on to suggest that anonymity plays a far greater role depending on the type of user participation, with users being more willing to write and respond to comments when they are anonymous, but with anonymity having little impact when it came to users simply 'liking' something on the platform. As they explain it, this is to be expected "since posts are considered much more personal statements than reviews in the form of likes or votes" (2018: 34). As YouTube is a non-anonymous platform that allows for both types of user participation, one would expect to see a similar pattern in terms of the levels of user engagement across these different types. It should of course be noted that despite YouTube requiring some sort of identification before a comment is made by a user, there is nothing stopping them from setting up a false account with a pseudonym so that they can still make comments 'anonymously' (Holmes, 2017).

Before proceeding to discuss what impact user comments may have on journalism it is first worth considering why members of the public write comments online. Whilst it has already been mentioned that there are personality traits that may explain why some people are more likely to comment than others (Wu & Atkin, 2016), one can look beyond these and consider the broader motivations of online commenters. Research by Blumler & McQuail (1969) and Ruggiero (2000) suggest that there is a strong correlation between media use and gratification and as Ancu & Cozma (2009) note, online media is particularly well suited for this due to its interactive features such as control over content and communication tools. Although limited to the social networking site MySpace, Ancu & Cozma's research found that these online spaces "mainly gratify visitors' need for social interaction" as well as "information-seeking and entertainment needs." (2009: 578) being secondary motives. By having the capability to allow social interaction as well as provide important information, YouTube acts as an ideal platform

to meet the user's perception that their online behaviour "is an effective means of communicating information to others" (Hoffman et al., 2013: 2256).

### **3.7: What impact do user comments have?**

There are a number of ways in which user comments impact the journalism industry. One such way is the impact they have on a news outlets credibility. This is certainly an important area of impact due to recent trends of increasing distrust in the news media as a whole as discussed in previous chapters. Conlin & Roberts (2017) asked the question of whether the presence of comments and the amount of which are read by a user, affect their perceptions of the credibility of the messenger (i.e. news outlet). They found that "news that is presented in a way that is more associated with traditional news outlets—news without comments directly next to the story—is perceived as more credible." (2017: 373). This conclusion also factored in variables such as the type of commenting system being used as well as the type of moderation the news outlet was employing. Whilst there were some limitations with the study such as the age of the participants and it being set in experimental conditions, the conclusion that the mere presence of other users comments, regardless of what those comments are, has a negative impact on how news credibility is perceived is a note of concern. Conlin & Roberts' (2017) conclusion is supported by the work of Houston et al (2011) which looked at the influence of user comments on perceptions of media bias. Whilst their study was limited to looking at stories about presidential candidates in America, their data did suggest that "user comments accompanying online content can influence perceptions of that content." (2011: 88). In conjunction, these two studies highlight that the impact of user comments can be viewed both from the news outlets side as well as from the audience's side.

As well as having an impact on how the audience perceives a news outlet or story, the presence of user comments also has an impact directly on the journalists themselves. A study by Santana (2011) found that nearly 70% of the journalists he interviewed felt that user comments had in some way changed their thinking about the newsworthiness of a

topic. Santana also found that user comments altered the way journalists do their job in some way such as including more sources, more facts or being more cognisant of their word choice. When this is combined with the fact that “more than 98 percent of reporters who responded said they read the online comments at their newspapers at some level” (Santana, 2011: 73), this means that user comments are having a profound role in the news content the public receives. These numbers are made more interesting by Santana’s other finding that only 15% of journalists either agreed or strongly agreed that user comments promoted thoughtful discussion. So whilst the majority of journalists find user comments unhelpful in having a civil dialogue with their audience, something that also links back to the earlier discussion around toxic comments, they still find them useful when it comes to story ideas or shaping the content they put in their stories. The findings by Santana somewhat reflects the views of journalists that were found in research conducted by Nielsen (2012) in which journalists expressed “support for readers' ability to comment on articles” (2012: 96).

Despite user comments being perceived as a way of seeking attention, being vulgar in nature or as a method of harassment, the consensus among journalists appears to be that they would rather put up with the negative aspects that come with comment sections than do without them at all. Research by Santana (2011), Nielsen (2012), Tenenboim & Cohen (2013), Almgren & Olsson (2015) and Krebs & Lischka (2017) all indicate that news outlets and journalists are aware of both the negative and positive impacts of user comments and overall see them as at worst being “neither directly beneficial nor harmful for online news brands” (Krebs & Lischka, 2017: 1) and at best a way to “improve reader-journalist interaction, which would - as this research has shown - improve the quality of journalism.” (Santana, 2011: 78).

### **3.8: YouTube metrics**

With the news industry being as competitive as ever, news organisations are keen to understand what the public wants in terms of the news content they receive. One way in which they can begin to understand these wants, is to look at the direct engagement

and feedback their content receives, and this is far easier to do on platforms such as YouTube. With the type of user engagement detailed above being one of the unique aspects of YouTube as a news platform, it is important to consider the role that the quantifiable nature that the engagement takes form of has, regarding both consumers and content producers standpoint.

On YouTube, there are four key metrics that are publicly available for each video. The number of people who have viewed the video, the number of people who have clicked either the like or dislike button on the video and the number of comments that have been written by viewers on the video. Whilst views, likes, dislikes and comments all can be deemed as measures of user engagement it is important to highlight the differences between them. Whilst they are all in some way, a way to measure the extent to which a video has been engaged with, the metric or act of 'viewing' can be seen as being the most passive form of engagement as it requires the least amount of effort on the part of the audience. The act of 'liking' or commenting on a video can be seen as a more active form of engagement given the extra effort required on the part of the audience for these metrics to register. The existing body of work around the use of comment sections online (Nagar, 2011; Larsson, 2011) demonstrates that active engagement is a metric to be valued by academics just as much as other measurements of engagement. One notable study that deals with these concepts of passive and active engagement as described above is by Tenenboim & Cohen (2013) in which they examined the relationship between the number of comments and number of clicks on over 15,000 online written articles over 5 years. Their study found that the most clicked articles tended to have the most sensational content whereas the more political or controversial articles had more comments on them. The argument that more controversial news content garners more comments is supported by Weber (2013) and also by the trend in communications research where many studies focusing on comment sections analyse controversial topics such as science (Secko et al, 2011) and politics (Stroud et al, 2016).

As well as considering how the metric of a video on YouTube may help inform content producers as to what types of content is getting the most audience attention, it is also important to discuss the role these metrics play in determining what content the public actually receives. Unlike traditional media platforms where content producers have a great degree of control over what content the audience sees/hears, (For example when the public watches CNN, CNN controls what is seen on their channel), on YouTube, news media organisations have far less control over what the public is subjected to. This is due to YouTube's algorithm that plays a central role in what sort of videos are promoted towards its users.

The precise nature of YouTube's algorithm is protected and hidden by Google which has led content creators to "develop their own theories about how things work, and academics are left attempting to imitate and recreate these systems from the outside." (Lewis, cited in Stokel-Walker, 2019). Prior to 2012, YouTube ranked videos simply based on the number of views that they had received, before transitioning in 2012, to using both view duration and time spent on the platform as a means of determining which videos would get promoted (Cooper, 2019). Over subsequent years, YouTube has gradually changed its algorithm in response to various factors such as its perceived promotion of radical right-wing content (Lewis, 2019) and trying to raise more authoritative voices (YouTube, 2019). The opaque nature of YouTube's algorithm, coupled with possibility it can change on a regular basis, has forced content creators to experiment with ways in how best to 'game' the system into promoting their content over others. One manner in which this has taken form is by leaning upon old media norms found in print media by utilizing sensationalist video titles in the hopes of gaining the attention of the public (Ng & Zhao, 2018) and thereby increasing the metrics of their video which will subsequently be further promoted by the algorithm. There is evidence to suggest that by adopting old media logics such as the use of clickbait, can be effective and increasing a videos popularity as YouTube's recommendations algorithm is susceptible to these tactics (Zannettou et al, 2018) Although it would seem that the amount of comments digital content receives is an important metric in determining the success of the content, at least from a content producers standpoint, research by

Pendersen (2019) which focused on hobbyist YouTubers, indicates otherwise. By interviewing YouTubers who were actively producing content and had fewer than 1 million subscribers, she found out of 13 possible algorithmic features on YouTube, comments were deemed only the 10th most important factor in determining the success of a video (Ibid: 20).

Another way content creators can influence the algorithm is through the use of effective thumbnails for their videos. A video thumbnail is an image used for a video that is supposed to represent the type of content within the video (Hurst et al, 2011). These can be automatically generated by YouTube itself or content creators can make their own custom thumbnails. Although the style of image used on platforms like YouTube may differ from traditional platforms, such as by being intentionally ugly (Douglas, 2014), once again this is an illustration of old media logics being used on new media platforms as the use of images to attract an audience's attention has been well researched (see Knox. 2009; Miller & Roberts, 2010; Lockyer & Attwood, 2009). The impact that thumbnails have on YouTube's algorithm and subsequently the level of user engagement is hard to determine given the little systematic empirical research on this precise issue. Whilst comparisons could potentially be drawn from similar but broader areas such as the effectiveness of types of images in getting an audience's attention (Mortensen, 2015), research by Heusner et al (2019) that looked specifically at the use of typography within YouTube thumbnails, found that "typography does not have a direct correlation with number of views or subscribers" (Ibid: 12). This finding does however contrast somewhat with the work of Pendersen (2019) who through her interviews found that a YouTube video's thumbnail was seen as the second most important factor in determining the success of a video.

In sum, it is incredibly hard to predict what level of importance should be afforded to each metric that is analysed by YouTube's algorithm. As well as some of the elements raised above, Covington (2016: 15) points out that elements such as 'freshness', this being the balancing of new content with well-established videos, as well as the historical

behaviour of users on the platform are difficult factors for both content creators and researchers to predict.

### **3.9: Cable News Landscape**

Many of the studies discussed in this chapter so far, deal with the notion of engagement in terms of how the public interacts with digital content, often on their own networks native website. However, given the domination that certain media organisations already have on existing platforms, combined with YouTube's recent push to prioritize authoritative voices, including news sources like CNN and Fox News (YouTube, 2019), it is important to understand where a lot of news content on YouTube is originating from.

The passage of the Cable Franchise Policy and Communications Act of 1984 in America had a twofold effect on TV news environment. The first was that it allowed the emergence of new, dedicated 24-hour news channels. The second effect was that these new channels diminished the power of the three large broadcast networks, namely ABC, CBS and NBC (Morris, 2009). This increase in competition within the TV news landscape can be seen as taking place in three main phases, the first occurring with the introduction of CNN in 1980 followed by a race for "transnational reach and influence" (Cushion, 2010: 19) and finally a "regionalization of 24-hour news channels on a global scale" (2010: 24), which is the third phase that we are currently in.

The success of CNN in America during this first phase, through the reporting of events such as the Challenger space shuttle disaster paved the way for other 24-hour news networks to enter the American news market (Rai & Cottle, 2007), most notably, MSNBC and Fox News. These three were and still remain the dominant 24-hour news networks on cable TV in America as is seen by their viewing figures (Pew Research Center, 2014a). It is important to note that whilst there are now hundreds of news channels across the world, only a minority of these are global in reach whereas the rest deal with only regional or national matters (Rai & Cottle, 2007).

The advantages of having 24-hour rolling news are clear to be seen when certain global events happen. These advantages can be seen both in terms of the public sphere whereby a constant stream of information helps better inform the public and in terms of the organisations themselves regarding the economic opportunities that are opened up. The attack on the Twin Towers in 2001 or Indonesian tsunami in 2004 highlighted the networks ability to break news as well as showcased the usefulness of constant news coverage (Fertig et al, 2005). However, whilst big news leads to big audiences, (Shaw, 2003) there is often not a natural disaster or other globally significant event happening and so as a 24-hour news channel, that time must be filled with something else. This is something that other TV networks in that market such as NBC or ABC do not have to deal with as whilst they do have news programming on their schedule, it is not all day long as they also air entertainment or sports programs as well.

Due to increased competition, both from other networks as well as from external sources such as the internet, the demand for profit to be made from the main three cable news networks is becoming an ever increasing challenge (Gunther, 1999). The predominate two ways in which the networks make money is through cable subscriptions and advertising (Weprin, 2010) and so the most important thing for these networks, financially speaking, is their viewing figures, which is to say how many people are tuning in and watching their channel. For any TV channel or show to gain viewers, it must appeal towards a certain demographic within society. Whilst certain news topics may not be inherently appealing in and of themselves, the angle and delivery of the topic may appeal more to some than to others.

There have been many arguments made both for and against the notion that people seek out news sources that reinforce their already existing beliefs and views when it comes to political topics (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, 2010; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Holbert, Garrett, & Gleason, 2010) and this is for all mediums, not just in TV news. However, despite online news growing as the main source of news for people, TV is still the main source for most people (Bialik & Matsa, 2017) and as discussed earlier in relation to cross pollination of content, a lot of TV content makes its way onto other



platforms such as YouTube. Due to this possibility, it is important the environment in which this content is created, is explored. The reason for the focus on the US landscape in particular is due to the fact it is considered one of the most polarized media environments in the world (Edkins, 2017).

With a purportedly diverse range of media outlets (Holbert, Hmielowski & Weeks, 2012), people are able to consume the type of news that they want. The steady rise in viewership for CNN, MSNBC and Fox News, combined with a drop in figures for the other three major broadcast networks in America, has led scholars to suggest that audiences are now preferring more ideologically oriented news (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). To understand how the current landscape of the American cable news networks came to be, one must understand the political landscape first.

Historically, America has always been a two party system with the Democrats representing one side of the aisle and Republicans the other. Often in two party systems, one is considered the social party, in which it supports labour movements and government spending on education whereas the other is more focussed on issues of defence (Lane, 1955). In America, the former is the Democratic Party and the latter is the Republican Party. Whilst both parties have changed significantly since their conception in the late 18th Century, they both still hold opposing views on many topics. Issues such as taxes, regulation, separation of church and state, welfare and gun control often divide people down party lines when polled (See Pew Research Center, 2011b; Saad, 2014). Many Americans however often do not wish to label themselves as simply belonging to either one party or the other, and studies show that when it comes to ideology, there are sub-categories under each umbrella label of each party (Pew Research Center, 2011a). Not only do politicians have to be mindful of these subcategories of ideologies when running for office, but arguably news networks must be as well when seeking viewers.

The reason for the networks needing to be mindful of these various categories of ideologies is that their viewing figures can be seen to be dependent upon it. There are numerous empirical studies that show that when given a choice, people tend to consume information that supports their own views and beliefs (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Mutz, 2006; Stroud, 2007, 2008). Whilst these studies suggest that people “prefer information that reflects their pre-existing political beliefs” (Holbert, Hmielowski & Weeks, 2012: 197), it does not suggest that people actively avoid information that is counter to their beliefs. Studies by Garret (2009a, 2009b) show that people who are able to control the information that they receive do not reduce the amount of information that would challenge their already held views and nor do they completely disregard opinion challenging stories. A study by Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng found that “selection of counterattitudinal articles was more likely among participants with greater interest in politics, conservative party preference, stronger party preference, more accessible attitudes and higher attitude importance” (2009: 426). If it is the case then, that people are drawn towards information that is either in support of their views, or directly counter to it, then it would lend some support towards the reasoning behind why the cable news networks have become more polarized in their presentation of information. This then begs the question as to whether or not the cable news networks have become more polarized since their creation. In the context of American politics, polarization is the term used to describe the acute division between opposing groups on any given topic. Bennett & Iyengar (2010) have argued that polarization has become more prevalent in news content in recent years as well as that it has caused the public's attitude towards politics to change as well (Holbert et al, 2010).

### **3.10: Polarization**

It has been strongly argued that politics in America has become polarized, largely in part to the two party system that dominates the country (Wang, 2014). Polarization across party lines can be seen most clearly when it comes to voting within and for the House of Representatives (Born, 2007; Jones, 2001). Both within academic research and by commentators, it has been noted that whilst polarization has always existed in

some form, it has increased in the last decade both amongst politicians and the public (Hetherington, 2001; Jacobson, 2004, 2005; Layman et al, 2010, Desilver, 2014). One way to illustrate how the public has become more ideologically polarized is to look at the shift away from the ideological political centre. Abramowitz (2010) found that from around the mid-1980s the percentage of people who were in the ideological centre decreased from 41% to currently 28%. Pew Research Center (2014b) has also found that there has been a decrease in the overlap of ideologies between both parties, with Democrats shifting to the left and Republicans shifting to the right. The degree to which the public has become polarized is still in dispute (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008), however the fact that there is at least some polarization still remains. Work by Davis & Dunaway (2016) as well as Bennett (2012), suggests that trends in the decline of group loyalties, growing party polarization and the fragmentation of the media all contribute towards the nature of the media content that is produced, at least in a Westernised setting. Given this, two questions to consider are how and why the media has contributed towards the current environment.

One way in which polarization could be looked at is the extremity of language being used by the media to create this polarization. Some evidence suggests that popular news media formats use a large amount of inflammatory language, insults and negative exaggerations (Sobieraj & Berry, 2011) and create multiples instance of outrage per hour (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). However, research by Prior indicates that “evidence for a causal link between more partisan messages and changing attitudes or behaviors is mixed at best.” (2013: 101). Prior goes on to suggest that strong partisan messaging by news organisations is likely only going to effect a small segment of the public as “perhaps 10–15% of Americans watch a considerable amount of cable news. A majority of these “news junkies” appears to specialize in one of the three cable news channels and select mostly ideologically matching content on other media.” (ibid: 122). If it is the case that these “news junkies” are seeking out ideological affirming news content which may be laced with intentionally polarising messaging, it could be suggested that these people would also be doing so on other platforms outside of cable news, namely, places such as YouTube.

It should be noted that polarization can occur across many lines and most scholarly attention has been given to the conservative/liberal divide in America when looking at news content (see Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006; Groseclose & Milyo, 2005). However, a recent study by McCluskey & Kim (2012), sought to answer the question of whether or not news content, specifically in print media, favoured polarized political views over more moderate ones. Through their analysis of interviews with advocacy groups and over 4000 newspaper articles, they found that there was “more evidence of polarization than moderatism in the representation of advocacy groups’ ideology in news” and that “in analyses of presence and tone, polarized groups had favourable treatment more often than moderates” (2012: 574). When this is factored in along with Kuklinski & Sigelman's (1992) study in which senators that had more extreme views received greater air time on TV news networks than more moderate senators, an argument can be made that there appears to be, at least in part, some effort within the media when covering politics, to favour more polarizing views. If this is indeed the case then it also needs to be looked at whether this is also true on non-traditional news platforms like YouTube.

A counter argument to this can be made by looking at studies by Schiffer (2002) and Croteau & Hoynes (1994) in which both found that the Washington Post and TV commentary program Nightline respectively, favoured people and topics that represented moderate and centrist political positions. As Schiffer noted “the norm of moderation helps journalists set the ideological boundaries, outside of which a senator ventures at the expense of issue association.” (2002: 18). From existing academic research on the question of whether or not the media favours representing extreme or moderate political positions, the evidence remains inconclusive due to the small number of specific studies, their contradictory data and the difficulty in defining what moderate political positions are in an ever changing politically engaged society. However, the inconclusive answer to this question does not mean that the news media in America has not become polarized in other ways, such as directly across party lines.

With the ever lowering costs and new technologies, a more diverse media landscape has been able to develop. Bennet & Iyengar (2008) have suggested that due to this, people are now able to choose the type of news that most closely reflects their own beliefs. As mentioned earlier, whilst this is not necessarily true (see Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009), there is still an economic incentive for the news media to cater for a polarized public. If the news media has not according to current research polarized along moderate/extreme lines, has it done so across party lines? A different way of phrasing this question, is whether or not different news content providers have chosen to support either of the two main political parties in America? Whilst similar questions could be asked of other countries, a focus on America is prudent in relation to this thesis for two reasons. The first is that as detailed above, America is seen as having one of the most polarized media landscapes in the world (Edkins, 2017) and hence any trends or relationships may be clearer to see. Secondly, it is because this thesis intends to look at networks whose main audience is based in America and who cover American affairs.

### **3.11: Media Bias**

There is a widespread notion in American politics that the mainstream media is slanted in favour towards centre-left ideologies. During the 2012 election, a national poll found that 59% of voters believed that Obama had received better treatment by the media compared with just 18% thinking that his opponent Romney had received better media treatment (Rasmussen Reports, 2012). This perceived notion of 'liberal bias' has been illustrated by Entman who showed that a search in the academic newspaper database Lexis-Nexis, for the term 'liberal media' returned "2825 items over the three years from 1 January 2006 to 31 December 2008" (2010: 390). However, a search for 'conservative media' over the same time period returned only 755 items. Entman also found that "searching directly for liberal or conservative 'bias' yields an even greater chasm, with almost eight claims of left-leaning bias for every one of rightward bias" (2010: 390). Similarly the perception of the media being liberally biased is supported by Watts et al (1999) who show that this perception is not a new phenomenon . All this shows

however, is that within the media, or at least newspapers in Entman's case, that there is a perceived bias towards liberal ideas. It is not evidence for actual bias.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, framing forms an important part of journalism and it is through the process of framing that biases may come about. However, before linking framing to bias, a distinction should be made between the use of the terms bias and slant. This distinction is important as often times those in the media will label something biased when they in fact mean slant. A slanted news report is one in which emphasis is placed upon one side's favoured frame whilst ignoring or disparaging the other side in a political conflict (Entman, 2010). The slanting of a report prompts the audience to give greater attention towards the favoured side of the conflict.

Bias itself is a slightly different concept, one that can be broken down into two separate terms, content bias and decision-making bias. Content bias, as defined by Entman is the "consistent patterns in the framing of mediated communication that promote the influence of one side in conflicts over the use of government power" (2007: 166). It is the consistent slanting of news in favour of one side that creates the bias and so to be able to show the existence of bias within the media, one must find evidence of this consistent slant. Decision-making bias is where there is "the influence of journalists' belief systems on the texts they produce" (Entman, 2010: 393). What this entails is that the beliefs and ideologies of those who work at news networks, shapes the way in which they make decisions about stories such as whether or not to include them. This concept links back to the previous chapter's discussion around the concept of journalistic routines and the role they play in the news making process.

To establish if content bias exists, one would have to provide evidence that there is a pattern in which the content is regularly slanted to one side or another. Given an American political context, this slanting is most likely to occur either in favour of the Democrats or the Republicans (Bennet, 1990; Entman, 2004).

One study that suggests that there is little evidence for news media bias is by David Niven (2003), which looked at newspaper coverage of congressional party switchers. Niven found that despite their being “countless others who believe in a pro-liberal, pro-Democratic media bias” (2003: 322) there was in fact very little evidence that national newspapers favoured one party or the other when it came to the issue of Congressmen who switch from one party to the other. However, when it comes to news networks in general rather than on a specific issue, there is much greater support for the notion of media content-bias. Groseclose & Milyo (2005) did a comprehensive study across multiple news outlets and found that aside from Fox News' Special Report and the Washington Times, all other outlets scored either the same or to the left of the average member of Congress. In order to measure the size of the slant, Groseclose & Milyo looked at the times each media outlet cited various think tanks and advocacy groups and then compared that with the number of times members of Congress cite the same groups. This study's findings point towards the notion that there is in fact an overall liberal bias when it comes to the news media. This combined with the fact Washington correspondents are generally more left-leaning voters (Povich, 1996; Lichter, Rothman, & Lichter, 1986), further cements the 'liberal-media' idea. These last two studies however should not be given any great persuasive weight on this issue as pointed out in a previous chapter, studies have shown that if anything, journalists may overcompensate any self-perceived bias they may have in their reporting (Drew, 1975).

Further support for the notion of a liberally biased media is through Hamilton's (2004) analysis of Pew Center surveys. Whilst on its surface it seems that those of a conservative disposition perceive a liberal bias in the media and those of a liberal disposition see a conservative bias, Hamilton points out that people are more inclined to perceive a bias in the media when the further slant of the news is to their own ideological position. As the Pew Center surveys that Hamilton looked at showed that those of a conservative disposition saw a bias in the media more so than liberals, this also suggests that there is evidence of a liberal bias.

Even more evidence of bias in the media is provided by studies by Lott & Hassett (2004), which shows how nine of the ten newspapers they examined were more likely to give negative headlines regarding economic news if the President is Republican, and also a study by Weatherly et al. (2007) which looked at the headlines of CNN and Fox News website articles during 2 months of the 2004 presidential campaign. Again, this study found that overall “CNN tilted more to the left than did Fox News” and that “the headlines from Fox News were rated slightly on the liberal side of neutral” (2007: 97). Another study looking specifically at the potential biases between CNN and Fox News by Morris & Francia (2010), found that Fox News was more biased in favour of the Republicans and that CNN's coverage was more impartial.

All evidence seems to suggest that there is indeed some level of bias within the major news media networks, particularly CNN and Fox News which this thesis also intends to look at, at least when it comes to party politics. There are also cases to be made in regards to bias towards pro-establishment positions (Bennet, 1996) and promotion of moderation and centrist conformity (Gerbner et al., 1982). A meta-analysis by D'Alessio & Allen (2006) of 59 studies that focussed on media bias in presidential campaigns since 1948 shows that overall, there was at least some small measurable level of media bias. Considering the discussions in earlier chapters regarding objectivity and the idea that journalists try to, or at least should try to shy away from subjectivity and bias, the apparent existence of bias within the media leads to the discussion as to why it is allowed to exist.

### **3.11: The success of bias**

Bias in the news media can be seen to have a number of sources and factors that contribute towards its existence. David Baron (2004) suggests that these factors can be split into two categories, demand-side and supply-side explanations. The former is where the demand for the bias comes from the public that consumes the news media, the latter is where “the availability of potential journalists who are willing to work for lower wages in positions in which they can advance their careers or influence the public



by exercising the discretion granted by a news organization” (2004: 2), generates a bias. One of the interesting results established by Baron's paper is that “with competition between two like-oriented news organizations the one with the greater bias has a lower price but can have higher profits” (2004: 24). This idea is interesting as it would provide reason as to the current landscape of the cable news networks in America. As shown earlier, people tend to seek out news sources that reinforce their existing beliefs. If this is the case, and considering Baron's results, it would provide some explanation as to why Fox News has been perceived to have become more biased towards conservative politics and why MSNBC has become more biased towards liberal politics.

One of the most successful news networks in America is Fox News. Having started in 1996, being available to around 17 million cable subscribers, as of August 2013, the network has grown to approximately reach just under 100 million households (Seidman, 2013) and in 2012 made 985.6 million dollars (Holcomb & Mitchell, 2013). Both academics and commentators have criticized Fox for its slanted approach to news (Monica, 2009; Barr, 2009; Jones, 2012; Smith. & Searles, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2009). Despite push back from those within Fox News (Memmott, 2004), the majority of people agree that Fox News is not, as its slogan until recently was, fair and balanced. Evidence of this bias can be seen in the tone of coverage for presidential candidates in the 2012 election. On Fox News, almost half of its Obama coverage was negative in tone whereas its coverage of Romney was twice as likely to be positive than negative (Holcomb, 2014). With the idea that media is generally liberally biased and that people seek out news that reinforces their own beliefs, it would explain why Fox News has been seen to have given biased reporting that is slanted towards conservative ideology and in part why the network has become so successful as with no other major news outlets providing a conservative bias, Fox News has found a niche within the market and capitalized on it.

By having a network that produced news that was geared towards speaking to the right side of the political spectrum, Fox News' successful business model has been copied by

MSNBC. With Fox News becoming successful both financially and in terms of ratings, MSNBC has arguably attempted to copy Fox, but in the politically opposite direction. With Baron's point that with two like-oriented news organisations, the more biased one will win out, it stands to reason that MSNBC has slanted towards the liberal side of American politics, knowing that it would struggle to out-slant Fox on the conservative side of politics. To give credence to Baron's point, in 2002/3 MSNBC did experiment with going right-wing but found that their experiment caused their rating to fall by 23% (Dana, 2013). With Fox News already having the largest share of the cable news audience, MSNBC has tried to play catch up and this can be seen in its emphasis being placed on opinion and commentary rather than factual reporting. Pew Research found that in 2012, 85% of MSNBC's news coverage was opinion based, compared with the 55% of Fox News and 46% of CNN (Jurkowitz et al., 2013). It should be noted that this data was gathered from 3 days in late 2012 and so due to the time of year, just after a national election, there is a chance that opinion driven news may be more likely. To further highlight the shift away from fact based news reporting, in an interview with the New Republic, the president of MSNBC Phil Griffin said that it is "a mistake for us to limit ourselves to news" (Dana, 2013). This shift towards analysis and opinion is important as it unburdens those working within the relevant newsrooms from ideals of objectivity and fact based reporting which in turn influences the decision making process of the production of news content.

The case of CNN also promotes the notion that bias in the media creates success. Out of the three major cable news networks, CNN is perceived to be the least ideological, with 33% of the public saying that is either mostly conservative or mostly liberal (Pew Research Center, 2009). Whilst it may be least ideological, it is still seen as having a liberal bias (An et al., 2012; Weatherly et al., 2007). Somewhat echoing the sentiments of MSNBC's president, CNN's president Jeff Zucker has said in a memo to CNN staff that one of his goals was "broadening the definition of news" at CNN and to have "more shows and less newscasts (Fung, 2014). It can be argued that this goal is merely an extension of what has already been achieved, not just at CNN but at the other networks as well. In their study of cable news coverage of public opinion and the 2004 party

conventions, Morris & Francia (2010: 846) have as part of their conclusion that “cable news has adopted a talk-show style format in which opinionated news analysts filter what they deem to be the important information”.

This shift in the type of content being produced has often been described as the rise of infotainment which as described in chapter 1 is a synonym for soft news and thus, damaging towards the public sphere. This infotainment can either be dealing with soft news topics such as celebrity gossip, or it can be hard news topics like politics that have been made to be more entertaining or easier to understand. The rise of this type of content is a response to the increased levels of competition in the media landscape and the fight to keep audiences interested (Franklin, 2003). This new type of content is what Franklin calls “McJournalism” which McChesney (2004) sees as being sensationalist due to its focus on topics such as sex and crime which are attention grabbing topics. Despite the previously discussed purposes of journalism, namely to provide information to the public so that they can make better informed decisions, the rise of infotainment is most noteworthy in the realm of political journalism where the content has shifted away from stories on policies (Oates, 2008: 94) towards more entertaining political stories such as personal scandals or the horse-race coverage of political campaigns (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1997: 12)

With the pursuit of ratings through the creation of more infotainment content by TV news channels (Thussu, 2007) , the cable TV networks in America are arguably failing to live up to one of their key roles in society, helping create a well-informed public. However, before any blame should be laid at the feet of these networks, consideration must be given to the previously discussed idea that they are merely responding to the demands of the audience. One final consideration that must be had here is that emerging news platforms such as YouTube are often not taken that seriously by executives (Kietzmann et al, 2011) and content already on the platform is sometimes seen as “frivolous” (Naim, 2009). The view of these executives is emblematic of the problem of legitimization that new platforms and technologies face with leaders in society often being slower to adopt them than the rest of the public (Karlsen. & Enjolras, 2016).

### **3.12: Conclusion**

Since its creation in 2005, YouTube has become the largest online video sharing platform. Due to its size, ease of access and proliferation through many other websites and organisations, it has been used in a multitude of ways for various purposes. Broadly speaking, YouTube has been studied by academia as another media platform from which to analyse any particular area of interest that could have previously been analysed via other mediums of communication such as TV or newspapers. Studies that broach the topics of public outrage regarding scandals by governments (Toepfl, 2011) or prejudice against certain communities such as the LGBT community (Rattan & Ambady, 2014) for example, could be done via other mediums, but YouTube has provided an additional platform from which these topics can be examined. Being a relatively new online platform has also meant that YouTube has created brand new areas of research, such as in the field of law, particularly in regards to copyright and intellectual property laws (Lee, 2007). This was most clearly seen when Viacom forced Google, who had recently purchased YouTube to remove over 100,000 videos from the site, many of which used copyrighted music.

Due to YouTube's growth within the media ecosystem, it has undoubtedly influenced other elements within the system. The way this influence has developed can be seen through the concept of media hybridization where the logics of old media, particularly television, have come up against the logics of new media platforms. The result of this clash is twofold. Firstly, media convergence has meant that existing genres, industries and audiences have combined with newer ones created by developments in technology. The consumption habits of audiences has changed due to their newly acquired ability to be hyper-selected with the content they choose to consume. This fragmentation of the audience has in turn forced content producers to adapt to this new type of audience. However, as pointed out in the chapter, the process of convergence is not just driven by the audience but also by the content producers themselves, whose drive to explore new financial opportunities and reach new audiences also facilitates the process.

The second result of the clash of media logics is found in the role that YouTube plays within the media ecosystem. The change in consumption habits as well as market forces, has compelled news organisations to change the type of content that newsrooms produce. Not only are more resources in newsrooms being dedicated towards digital and online video content, but stories are made in a more polarized fashion and they have become more entertaining at the cost of better informing the public. YouTube's role in the media ecosystem can also be seen in the greater focus paid towards the concept of user engagement. Due to Habermas' concept of the public sphere requiring public participation in the opinion forming process, the fact that YouTube enables greater participation, further validates the argument that the platform serves an important role within a healthy democratic society. The concept of media hybridization can thus be seen with the new logics of YouTube pushing old media organisations to place greater emphasis on user engagement whilst at the same time the old logics of cable television push new media platforms like YouTube place a greater focus on polarising or sensationalist content.

In sum, the development of new technologies and the increased access to digital platforms has led to a significant change in how the public consumes news media. YouTube is at the forefront of these changes due to it being the largest video website on the internet, it has influenced both audience consumption habits as well as how news organisations approach producing content. Given this, it is important to consider how the public sphere is potentially altered by the growing use of YouTube as a news platform by both audiences and news organisations alike.

## **CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1: Introduction**

The intention of this chapter is to layout the aims and methodological approaches that will be used to study how the various elements of news videos on YouTube play a role in the types of levels of user engagement. The chapter will be divided into several parts. The first section will outline and explain the proposed research questions. The second section will discuss the mixed methods approach taken by this study by explaining the benefits of using both content analysis and sentiment analysis as well as their limitations. The next section will detail the qualitative approach taken when attempting to look at the use of comments on YouTube videos. Finally, this chapter will detail the sampling strategy used and provide both context and justifications behind the choice of news organizations used.

### **4.2: Research questions**

As outlined in the introduction to this study, the main question this study is seeking to answer is “How does YouTube serve the public sphere?”. This central question has been broken down into more specific questions to enable more effective analysis.

RQ1: What type of news content is being uploaded to YouTube and how does its topic and format relate to types of user engagement with the videos?

RQ2: What role does the use of emotion in YouTube video titles play in the levels of user engagement?

RQ3: Do user comments reflect Habermas’ notion of the public sphere?

RQ 1 is concerned with the relationships between the types of news stories that are being on YouTube, the manner in which those stories are being presented and how

these may impact the levels of user engagement with the platform. The term 'type' in this question should be understood as what genre of news is being uploaded to YouTube, according to the coding framework. There are several guiding motives behind this question. Firstly, is that considering existing research such as that by Uribe & Gunter (2007) showing that topics of a sensationalist nature elicit a greater emotional response from an audience, is whether this emotional response in the realm of online videos translates into a form of user engagement. Seeing as the topic of a news story is one of its fundamental elements, if this were to be the case, then this would go some way to providing evidence towards the idea that at very least, the topic of news in online videos contributes in some way to the public's engagement and thereby success of said video. Secondly, when it comes to news in a visual medium, the manner in which it is presented can take many forms. These range from monologues direct to camera to panel discussions involving more than one person. It's important to consider what impact this may have on user engagement, as because of the growing perception that journalism is a dialogic act (Soffer, 2009), if it is the case that particular formats do seem to encourage greater user engagement, then this may have potential explanatory power regarding future research on how the news is presented in online video formats. Finally, this question seeks to establish whether or not there is any connection between the topic of news being presented and the style of presentation used. If a relationship between these two variables can be established then it would lend strength towards any conclusions one may wish to make regarding prescriptions for the type of news video on YouTube which is likely to maximize its level of user engagement.

Additionally, this question will also consider if the inclusion of user generated content has any impact on user engagement. The reason to include this consideration is that given the rise in the use of user generated content by news organisations (Wardle & Williams, 2010), this would provide evidence towards the argument of an increasingly hybridized media and specifically if in this instance, it is encouraging user engagement and hence potentially benefited the public sphere.

The purpose of RQ2 is to see whether the use of language in the framing of a story on YouTube has any impact on the level of engagement a video receives. The term 'levels' in this question refers to the numerical total of views, likes, dislikes and comments on each video. As has been discussed in the literature review, emotions and emotive language can play a crucial role in the framing of an issue or story. This, combined with other previous discussions about the ideas of hard and soft news and the distinctions between them should lead one to ask whether a news story on YouTube is more likely to be successful in terms of engagement if it frames its story in positive language or negative language. The results to this question should lead to two things. Firstly a basic answer to the research question. Secondly, provide evidence either for or against the common idea of 'If it bleeds, it leads' in that negative news stories are more common and more common due to the fact that people engage with negative stories more than they do positive ones.

Finally, RQ3 intends to evaluate the extent to which user comments left on YouTube videos provide any positive contribution towards the notion of the public sphere. The purpose of this is to attempt to provide some insight in regards to the quality of user engagement that occurs on YouTube. As was discussed in chapter 3, there are both passive and active forms of user engagement but among the active forms, comments written by the public have the greatest capacity for nuanced feedback for the producers of the news content. Not only do the quality of comments potentially influence news producers by praising or criticizing the news values that the user perceives to be present in the content they watch, the quality of comments will also speak towards whether or not they reflect the informed and rational dialogue that Habermas referred to in describing the public sphere. By considering their contribution, one should be able to scrutinize the efficacy of Habermas' requirement of freedom of expression and rational debate as criteria for determining the capacity of an online platform being a public sphere..

To answer all of these questions, this study undertook a combination of both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods which shall be detailed below.



### **4.3: Content analysis and sentiment analysis**

To answer the proposed research questions, a mixed methods approach was taken, by using a combination of quantitative methods, content and sentiment analysis as well as qualitative methods that afford this study the ability to look at user comments in finer detail.

A mixed methods approach to research has been a growing practice, most notably since the 1980's (McKim, 2017) across all fields of academic study (Heyvaert et al, 2013). The hallmark of a mixed methods approach is the combining of both quantitative and qualitative data to generate meta-inferences that could not be achieved by either approach alone (Guetterman et al, 2019). A mixed methods approach to the particular topic of study for this thesis is particularly beneficial as social media platforms such as YouTube are both quantitatively large in terms of raw data as well as containing qualitatively complex depth in terms of the nuance of unstructured text that is generated by users. (Colditz et al., 2017). That this benefit exists is illustrated in research by Snelson (2016) which has shown the large number of studies on social media platforms adopting a mixed methods approach. Colditz et al (2017), citing the work of Chou et al (2014) which studied obesity on social media platform, highlights how the use of natural language processing for the quantitative classification of themes alongside discourse analysis to provide illustrative qualitative examples. A further benefit of a mixed methods approach is detailed by Greene et al (1989), in which such approaches enhance the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of each individual approach. A final motivation for adopting a mixed methods approach in this study is that given the concept of the public sphere and the research questions outlined above, a single method in isolation may not be able to adequately explore and answer this particular area.

The first methodological approach that is used in this study is content analysis. Content analysis is a methodological approach that whilst being used across a wide range of

disciplines, is commonly used in communication studies to systematically analyse any given media text in order to manifest various trends and features in a quantifiable manner (Deacon et al. 2007). Content analysis has been one of the fastest growing forms of research over the past few decades (Yale & Gilly, 1988; Riffe & Freitag, 1997). During a content analysis, all of the media texts go through the same process to ensure consistency and to prevent research bias influencing any of the results (ibid). In the case of this thesis, the media texts were the YouTube videos uploaded to the chosen network's YouTube channels and the process that they went through was the coding framework described above.

The notion of using content analysis in the field of communication studies has been well established and thus can be seen to have been used frequently over the past several decades (Krippendorff, 2004). Its definition however has changed over time as demonstrated by one of the earlier definitions of it being “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952). Issues have been raised about this definition, not least its adherence to the notion of quantitative content and therefore disregard for any qualitative elements of media texts and research, as well as its use of the term “objective” which Berger & Luckman (1966) highlight as being problematic in that “even the most scientific methods of social research cannot produce totally objective results.” (Macnamara, 2011: 2).

More contemporary definitions are provided by Krippendorff who says that content analysis is a “systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessarily from an author's or user's perspective” (2004: 3), as well as Weber who says it is a “research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (1990a: 9). These are more appropriate definitions for this thesis as it allows for entrance of more qualitative elements which the study of language and emotion necessitate.

It has been argued by Berelson (1952, cited in Macnamara, 2011) that there are 5 main purposes of content analysis “to describe substance characteristics of message content; To describe form characteristics of message content; To make inferences to producers of content; To make inferences to audiences of content; To predict the effects of content on audiences.” (ibid: 3). These purposes are supported by Neuendorf (2002) who sees content analysis as being useful for allowing inference even though it cannot provide direct support for it. He also adds that such a methodological approach does allow for some limited predictive powers.

Despite its widespread use, there are several limitations inherent in using a content analysis methodology. Krippendorff (1989) believes that one of the limitations “stems from its commitment to scientific decision making” (Ibid: 407) which means that such approaches require large units of analysis in order to generate any significant findings. Additional limitations pointed to by Krippendorff are that it has a replicability requirement that implies fixed observer independent categories and also that the results from content analysis can only be generalised as far as the data set used. A further limitation in the use of content analysis is in the consistency which texts are classified. As Weber (1990b) put it, “reliability problems usually grow out of the ambiguity of word meanings, category definitions, or other coding rules.” (Ibid: 2). This limitation is not one that would be mitigated by the presence of an additional research method within this study and so extra justification for the coding rules and category definitions must be provided.

The overall reason why a content analysis approach was taken for this thesis is that it allows a researcher to quantify relevant and unambiguous features of a large quantity of media texts (Deacon et al, 2007). The quantification of a large body of texts allows a researcher to generate a set of interpretable data from which their analysis can be based and inferences made. The raw data generated for each of the variables enables a certain degree of basic analysis through the discovery of various trends and patterns in the data. However, it is when these variables are analysed against one another that deeper patterns can be ascertained and hence, can attempt to answer some of the research questions. It should be noted, as it is by Deacon et al that content analysis as

a method of research “tends to skate over complex and varied processes of meaning making within the texts” (2007: 119). This means that such an approach is not well suited for researching areas in a deep sense such as by attempting to answer questions pertaining to underlying reasons as to why certain trends or themes emerge from the data. However, as Berelson (1952) and Neuendorf (2002) contend, the purpose of such analysis is to provide description and inference.

In order to answer RQ2, which is concerned in part with the use of language, this study adopts a second methodological approach, sentiment analysis.

Sentiment analysis can be described as the “task of identifying positive and negative opinions, emotions, and evaluations.” (Wilson et al, 2005: 347). Although there were some arguable early forerunners in the research of sentiment analysis such as Carbonell (1979), there was a significant increase in the amount of research in this area around the turn of the 21st Century due to the improvement of machine learning methods and the datasets that the machine learning tools could utilise. Examples highlighting this flux of research include, Das & Chen (2001), Dini & Mazzini (2002) and Dave et al (2003). It should be noted that this area of research has used a range of terminologies in attempting to define itself including “opinion mining, sentiment analysis, and/or subjectivity analysis. The phrases review mining and appraisal extraction have been used, too, and there are some connections to affective computing” (Pang & Lee, 2008: 8).

Since its first use in research by Das & Chen (2001), the term “sentiment analysis” has usually been attached to research that focuses on the notion of polarity, that is to say whether the language used is either positive or negative (Pang & Lee, 2008). Given the broad range of terminologies that can be used within this area of communications research and the fact that this thesis intends to focus more on a simple positive/negative distinction in the use of language, it is therefore prudent to settle on using the term “sentiment analysis” as it refers specifically to this narrower interpretation.

A common approach in the conduction of sentiment analysis research is to start with a glossary or words and phrases that are all assigned either a positive or negative value, for example “love” being deemed positive and “hate” being deemed negative. However, due to the complexities of human language, context is also an important factor when attempted to put media texts through a sentiment analysis. Wilson et al (2005) give a range of examples where phrases such as “not good”, “does not look very good” and “not only good but amazing” (2005: 347-348) where the word “not” whilst usually being considered a negative word, can in fact just be negative of a small part of a phrase, negate the entire proposition or help intensify the positivity of a phrase.

At its most basic level, text that has undergone sentiment analysis can be deemed as having a positive/favourable reading, or a negative/unfavourable reading. Some of the early research into sentiment analysis looked at product and movies reviews and attempted to detect whether said reviews were overall positive or negative in nature (Turney, 2002; Pang, 2002). The intention of this thesis is to apply sentiment analysis to the titles of YouTube videos to determine whether or not the networks being researched are framing their videos, through their titles in either a positive or negative manner.

In order to implement a sentiment analysis, two main things are required. The first is a dataset to which the analysis can be applied. For this study, this takes the form of the title of each YouTube video. The second requirement is an algorithm through which the data can be processed through. To do this, the sentiment analysis software SentiStrength was chosen.

There were several reasons why this software was chosen. Firstly the programme has already been used in other studies that have looked at measuring the emotion within the text of social media posts (Thelwall, Buckley & Paltoglou, 2011). This helps establish the notion that the software is suitable for academic use. A second reason is that software comes with a glossary of words and phrases so that it is not required that an entire new glossary of words and what their perceived positive or negative value is. This

is beneficial as it prevents any bias from the researcher in the selection of words that may be chosen to be analysed.

A third benefit of the software is that the end result of a sentiment analysis through the use of SentiStrength is a numerical value being ascribed to each data input. In the case of this thesis, each YouTube title that is processed by SentiStrength will be given a value ranging from +3 to -4, denoting the overall positive or negative strength of the sentiment expressed in the language of the title. Whilst the software does allow for a more binary result to be generated, +1 or -1, the option of having the data presented in a scale was chosen to enable greater nuance in the discussion of the data. A further benefit of the SentiStrength software is that its algorithm factors in contexts of language such as the use of punctuation that may act as an intensifier as mentioned by Wilson et al (2005). Finally on practical grounds, the software is not complex to use and hence should another researcher wish to replicate the study with a different dataset, they would not require much training in order to conduct the research.

The way that SentiStrength was used in this study was that each of the 1239 videos of the dataset had their video title input into the SentiStrength programme. This then generated both a positive and negative sentiment score for the title based on the type of words and grammar used. By combining the positive and negative scores together, a final total sentiment score was created for each video title. This ranged from +3 to -4 across the entire dataset.

The reason why headlines were chosen to go through the sentiment analysis was that it was the only variable that could be collected from YouTube videos that had the capability of having its language analysed in such a systematic way. Although it may have been possible to transcribe all of the words that were being spoken in each video and then put these transcripts through the SentiStrength software, not only would this have not been practical with some videos being over an hour in length and some not having any spoken words as the video relied on just visual graphics, but such analysis would not be necessary to answer the proposed research questions.

It is hoped that by performing a sentiment analysis on the titles of YouTube videos that it will generate results that not only help answer RQ2, but also be relatable to some of the existing work and ideas detailed in chapters 1 and 2.

A final aspect of this study's methodological approach is the use of case studies. The final analysis chapter of this study attempts to answer RQ3 which is concerned with whether user comments reflect Habermas's notion of the public sphere through the highlighting of particular instances of user comments that speak towards aspects of Habermas' public sphere. Whilst answers to this question could be derived from the more broader results generated in the data collection used to answer RQ1 and RQ2, case studies all for an "in-depth inquiry into a specific and complex phenomenon (the 'case'), set within its real-world context." (Yin, 2013: 321). Even though case studies are limited to descriptive or exploratory objectives, for the purposes of this study, they will be used to illustrate various aspects that can be found within the user comments on news videos on YouTube in order to not only facilitate discussion for RQ3 but also suggest future areas for academic research. The use of user comments in academic research raises the ethical consideration of user privacy. that must be addressed. The issue of user privacy is a common concern when researching social media platforms (Baym & Boyd, 2012). For this study, the ethical risks can be considered relatively low due to two key factors. Firstly the comments being analysed have been posted by members of the public who have accepted the platforms terms of service which acknowledges how the posting of comments means that their "content may become accessible through search engines" (Google, 2019). Secondly, by adopting the approach taken by Trevisan & Reilly (2014: 1143) wherein focus is placed on what was said rather than who said it, by not naming who wrote the comments and focussing simply on the content of what was written, the risk of a user identification is greatly mitigated.

The five case studies that are analysed in this study were chosen by selecting videos after the initial content and sentiment analysis, that demonstrated some aspect of the

literature discussed regarding user engagement within chapter 3. These five aspects were capitalisation, the use of hashtags, the use of humour/anger, the target of the comments and the depth of discussion. With all cases, the comments looked at were sorted using YouTube's own algorithm of the 'Top comments' sort function. There are two reasons for this. Primarily is that it helps focus on the comments that are most likely to be read by the news outlets that has produced the video and hence deserve greater attention. Secondly, the only other sorting function is by 'Newest first' and the comments produced by this are less likely to have had an impact on both the producers of the video as well as other commenters. It is also worth noting that because of commercial reasons, YouTube is secretive about how its 'Top comments' algorithm works and so it is impossible to precisely say why particular comments have risen to the top of any given video.

The purpose of using both content analysis and sentiment analysis is that both of these methods generate different data which is suited towards answering the different research questions. A purely statistical analysis of the metrics that can be recorded on YouTube, whilst providing some of the answers to RQ1, would not provide data that would help answer any of the issues raised in RQ2. Whilst there are a number of ways in which the use of language can be analysed, given the large amount of data that is used in the study, sentiment analysis is well suited to be used alongside content analysis. Whilst both methods are able to work in tandem with one another, there are limitations that arise in doing so. One of these limitations is that by using both methods in one project, is that it limits the range of replicability of the study. Whilst future studies could be done in a similar manner, in order for comparisons to be drawn between this and future studies, similar categorisations as well as values of sentiment would be required.

#### **4.4: Research sample**

In order to answer the proposed research questions, a decision was made to was made to look at 5 YouTube channels that were run by large, professional news organisations.



Given that YouTube has attempted to raise authoritative voices on the platform (YouTube, 2019), the 5 channels that were chosen were either already well established news brands that existed on other platforms or were news organisations that YouTube itself has partnered with, thereby demonstrating their trust in that organisations.

Given the global reach of the internet as well earlier discussions around how polarization is most clear in Western societies, most notably America, the channels that were chosen all had at least some output that was centred around American politics. Also, as there is the argument that American politics and culture informs global politics and culture (Sussman & Galizio, 2003) along with the practical consideration of the researcher and software only being able to analyse English language media texts, the 5 networks that were chosen were: CNN, Fox News, BBC News, Al Jazeera English and The Young Turks.

The justifications for each of these networks being looked at range from practical reasons that were applicable to each of them such as for the research to be meaningful each channel would have to have uploaded a sufficient and consistent amount of videos during the time of data collection, to individual reasons for their selection based on the nature of the news organisation itself as well as them being established news brands within both existing scholarly research and the general public.

The first network chosen for this study was Fox News. For many years, Fox News has been one of the most dominant voices in news in America. It has been the most watched news network in cable news for 62 consecutive quarters (Katz, 2017a). Not only does it dominate the cable news landscape but also the cable media landscape having the most prime time and total viewers for all of basic cable. The average number of viewers during prime time across the week is around 2.3 million total viewers and 472,000 for those between the ages of 25 to 54 (Katz, 2017a). The demographics of Fox News are that 53% of its audience is over the age of 50, slightly over half are women, 43% have attained a high school level of education or less and over 60% of its audience considers itself ideologically conservative (Pew Research, 2012). The

ideological slant of its audience can be attributed to the idea that the network caters towards conservative points of view. Research conducted by Jamieson & Cappella (2008), Groeling (2008) and Bard (2017) all indicate that Fox News has a positive bias towards conservative ideology or at least provides more favourable coverage to the Republican party in America. It is also worth pointing out that at the time of data collection, two of Fox News' most watched shows which are hosted by Sean Hannity and the now sacked Bill O'Reilly, skew even more towards a conservative audience with 78% and 69% respectively (Pew Research, 2012). One apt summation of Fox News is provided by Jim Rutenberg in which he states, "Fox has brought prominence to a new sort of TV journalism that casts aside traditional notions of objectivity, holds contempt for dissent and eschews the skepticism of government as mainstream journalism's core" (2003). It is for these reasons that Fox News was deemed a suitable network for this study.

A network that is similar to Fox News in terms of scope and presence within the media ecosystem is CNN. In recent years, the cable news channel has seen a record number of viewers in a number of measurements such as for particular shows like 'The Lead' with Jake Tapper and in more general terms such as viewers between the ages of 25 to 54. The average number of prime time viewers across a week is around 1.05 million (Katz, 2017b). In terms of demographics, CNN has a slightly younger audience than its rival Fox News with 43% of its audience being over the age of 50. Unlike Fox News however is the ideology of its audience which is fairly evenly split between conservative, moderate and liberal: 32%, 30% and 30% respectively. CNN has traditionally been viewed as a 'hard news' channel, this particularly being seen during breaking news events like the first Gulf war and the attacks on 9/11. However, even as far back in 2003 it was noted that "in order to avoid losing viewers to their competitors, CNN has substantially increased the percentage of its broadcasts devoted to soft-news oriented topics and formats" (Baum, 2003:179). This point is worth holding on to as it will likely come up during later discussions around the network's YouTube content. Further rationale for including CNN's YouTube channel in this study is based upon the existing scholarly work that has been done on the organisation (see Robinson, 2002; Bahador,

2011). Existing research on this organisation legitimises further investigation, particularly that which explores the networks use of new platforms such as YouTube.

The third YouTube channel chosen for this study was BBC News. There are several reasons for its inclusion, the first of which being the perception that it produces some of the highest quality journalism on the international stage (Anderson & Eggleton, 2012). Due to its extensive network of bureaus and journalists, the BBC has the capacity to cover various issues and events across the world. As such, it has a weekly global news TV audience of 99 million (BBC, 2017). The breadth of the BBC's international news service audience means it is difficult to pin down precise data regarding its demographics. For example, among its top 10 markets are America, Pakistan, Tanzania and Brazil. This coupled with the fact that "one in every 16 adults around the world uses BBC News" (BBC, 2016) means that its inclusion in the study should go some way to alleviating criticisms of the studies heavily US/Western focus. Also, much like CNN, there is a deep well of research on the organisation, covering its multiple aspects (see Bicket & Wall, 2009; Anderson & Eggleton, 2012), further legitimising research that looks at the organisation from new perspectives. One final consideration in choosing BBC News for this study is that it is a public service broadcaster and therefore does not have to worry, at least not as much, as its commercial counterparts. This may be an important factor when it comes to reviewing the use of sensationalised video titles in order to get the attention of a larger audience as it may be the case that the news values pursued by public service broadcasters like the BBC, may differ to those from the likes of CNN and this may come through in the data for this study. This is also an important consideration due to points raised during the literature review that commercial forces are deemed by many to have a degrading impact on the public sphere (Franklin, 2008; McQuail, 2010: 222).

The fourth network chosen for this study is Al Jazeera English (AJE). This is the English language version of its Arabic speaking parent network Al Jazeera. Much like the BBC, because the channel is carried all over the world, it is difficult to pin down precise and recent numbers regarding its demographics and viewing figures. It broadcasts in over

260 million homes in over 130 countries (Al Jazeera, 2012). Whilst it is hard to say how many people in those 260 million homes is watching, the size of AJE's audience can still be put in perspective when compared to other networks. For instance, in 2011 a public broadcast station in America, KCET-TV, decided to carry AJE's newscasts four times a day. The station claimed that each week these newscasts drew in over 285,000 viewers (Szalai, 2011). For further context, one can also look at AJE's America specific channel Al Jazeera America which launched in 2013. During its first few months, the channel averaged 13,000 viewers a day (Mirkinson, 2014) which was far below all other cable news channels. Despite this, AJE has a more established brand than its American offshoot channel did and likely performs far better in terms of overall audience numbers, not just in America but internationally as well. This is demonstrated during particular global events such as the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 during which time Al Jazeera English saw over 1.6 million views from America on its internet livestream of the event (Stelter, 2011). This shows that there is indeed a substantial audience willing to consume AJE content. Academic work concerning the audience preferences and content interaction of Al Jazeera have tended to focus more on its Arabic speaking channels (see Al-Rawi, 2016) and comparisons between the Arabic and English speaking audiences are unlikely to be apt.

All of the channels detailed so far belong to well established, traditional news organisations. As such, the range of academic research on these news networks is exceedingly large and spread across a range of diverse research interests. Coupled with this is that due to the impact of the fast pace of change in technology has had over the industry, many studies are somewhat dated when it comes to trying to contextualise each of the networks. Examples of this include studies by Dilawari et al (1991) and Johnson et al (1999). In more recent years however, there have been more network specific studies such as those done by Palmer (2012) and Haigh & Bruce (2017) that each looked at CNN. It is for this reason that a fifth YouTube channel was chosen, one that was native to the platform that is being researched as this would help provide both context and contrast against these established news organisations.

Thus, the final YouTube channel chosen for this study was The Young Turks (TYT). The network's origins are from a radio show from 2002 on Sirius Satellite Radio with the same name. It began producing online video content in 2005 soon after the launch of YouTube. Since then the network has expanded to contain multiple channels on YouTube, partnered with the platform on a number of initiatives such as premium subscriptions and also appear on a number of distribution platforms such as streaming services like Hulu and also on traditional platforms such as on the Current TV cable channel. This being yet another example of media hybridization.

Whilst it is hard to make operational comparisons between TYT and the other networks in this study due to factors like them having no official news bureaus, fewer than a dozen reporters and running a budget of only \$1million per month (Oh, cited in Flanders, 2017) there are still other metrics that can be used to contextualize them against the others. For instance as of March 2016, they received 86 million unique views a month and have a lifetime total of over 4 billion views (Yu, 2016). Their audience is far younger than the other networks mentioned with 76% being under the age of 25 (Uygur, cited in Variety, 2015). The network styles itself as having a politically progressive approach to the news (Madlena, 2010) and will often approach topics from a liberal perspective. The hosts of the main show are open about this fact (see Burrell, 2014; Murphy, 2017) and believe their openness to this potential bias has a number of upsides when it comes to delivering the news. Other factors that justify TYT's inclusion in this study is grounded in the argument that their news values and their style are different from the other organisations. Firstly, due to the aforementioned lack of bureaus and reporters the vast majority of their content relies on reporting from journalists of other networks or news organisations. This may mean that Harcup & O'Neill's (2001) news values of 'Follow-up' and 'Newspaper agenda are less likely to be in the decision making process at the organisation. Secondly, as TYT was not established within the confines of traditional media, it is not as prone to the use of teleprompters or not swearing live on air. A final reason for including TYT in this study is due to the current lack of academic research that has been conducted on the organisation. Given

its current size, it is prudent to raise its profile within academia so that it may warrant further studies on the organisation from different perspectives.

In all, these 5 organisations represent a significant section of the news content being uploaded to YouTube by new organisations and in combination provide enough of a foundation in order to attempt to answer the research questions posed in this study. The choice of networks does however shape the scope of any conclusions that can be drawn from this study in that they are all focused in varying degrees to an American-centric approach to news production. This Western media focus may mean that it is difficult to make broader claims about news media in general on YouTube. Additionally as four of the networks in this study are commercial organisations, it may be difficult to make arguments about public service news providers.

With the organisations for the study established, it was decided that each of the organisations main YouTube channels would be monitored over two 1 week periods, wherein each video uploaded to the channels was documented according to the coding framework that will be detailed below. Over the combined two week period, a total of 1239 videos were coded.

The two 1 week periods where the data collection took place were the weeks commencing 01.05.15 and 08.11.15. The main reason for collecting the data across two distinct time periods was that if there were any major global news event that had the potential to dominate a news cycle for an extended period of time, then by having two distinct periods of data collection any effects a single event may have on the data should be somewhat mitigated. Altogether across the combined two weeks, 1239 videos collected. This was deemed a broad enough sample size to answer the proposed research questions. Had additional data been required, additional weeks could have been added to the data collection period.

Following a brief pilot study wherein what sort of data it would be possible and practical to collect, it was determined that each video in the sample could be broken down into 15

distinct variables that could easily be coded and used during the analysis phase of the study.

#### **4.6: Coding Framework**

During the periods of data collection, the following coding framework was used to record each of the variables for each video. Each of the variables was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet with the data being manually input by a single coder. The variables recorded were chosen based on the availability of the variable, in that was it publicly accessible on YouTube; the relevance to the literature review and proposed research questions as well as if the variable would afford the researcher some pragmatic use when searching through the database at a later date. A full description of the frame can be found in the appendix but these are the outlines and justifications for each of the 15 variables:

The first variable was an individual ID for each video. This was done so that each video collected could be uniquely identified.

The second variable was the date that the video was uploaded onto its respective YouTube channel. This was recorded so that any patterns in the frequency that each of the networks uploaded videos could be potentially determined.

The third variable was the organisation that had uploaded the video.

The fourth variable was the topic of the video. This was the predominant subject that was covered in the video. Although some videos may have broached several subject matters, the predominant one was chosen for recording. How the predominant topic was determined can be found in the appendix.

The fifth variable was the length of each video. This was recorded as during the pilot study, some videos were found to be of extreme length compared to others and so it

was determined that it would be an important variable to track if one wished to easily group these longer videos, particularly given the discussion of literature surrounding the notion of audience attention presented in earlier chapters.

The sixth variable was the format of the video. This meant recording what was the predominant way in which topic of the video was being presented such as in an interview format or a group discussion. How the format was determined is detailed in the appendix.

The seventh variable was whether the video contained any user generated content.

The eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh variables were the total number of views, comments, likes and dislikes that the video had received at the time of recording. Each as these were seen as the variables of user engagement, with the latter three being considered more active forms of user engagement.

The twelfth variable recorded was the title of each video. These titles were copied verbatim as it was deemed important to retain the original formatting of the title so that aspects such as capitalisation and use of punctuation were preserved. This was important due to the sentiment analysis that would be performed on the data.

The final three variables were the URL of the video, the tags of the video and additional notes. The URL was recorded so that it would be easy to find the videos again. Tags were assigned to various videos if they pertained to a particular news event such as a specific natural disaster. This was done so that it would be easier to search through the data set during analysis. Finally, a specific variable was created so that the coder could write any additional notes on any video if there was something particularly noteworthy such as the entire video not being in English. Like the previous two variables this was done to make searching the database slightly easier.



One of the key characteristics of content analysis is having an objective research procedure that is free of any potential biases of the researcher. (Berelson, 1952 cited in Richardson 2007, p.15). Given that Krippendorff (1986) and Weber (1990b) highlight the need for reliability in content analysis, the coding framework (Appendix A) was given to a second coder along with 50 randomly chosen videos from the study sample. Out of all of the variables in the coding framework only V4 Topic, V6 Format and V7 Use of user generated content, were checked for agreement between both coders as these were the variables that required subjective interpretations in terms of categorisation. The other variables were just factual inputs and so the reliability in recording them through a single coder was guaranteed.

For the variable of “Topic”, across the 50 videos, there was an 86% agreement on what topic was being discussed in each video with only 7 disagreements in total. For the variable of “Format”, there was a 94% agreement on what format was being used in each video with 3 disagreements in total. For the variable of “Use of user generated content” there was an agreement of 98% on whether there was any user generated content was present in the video. The high level of agreement across these variables helps guarantee the extent to which this study can be replicated as well as strengthening the validity of arguments made in the analysis based on the entire sample used in this study. Due to these high levels of agreement, it was determined that the coding framework did not need to be changed.

#### **4.7: Conclusion**

The previous chapters in this study discussed the existing literature around the concepts of the public sphere, news values, objectivity, the role of emotions, changes in news consumption and how YouTube as a platform has been previously approached by scholars. With these areas in mind, this thesis intends to look at the role that YouTube plays within the public sphere, particularly in relation to the news content that is being uploaded to the platform as well as how audiences are engaging with the content. In order to do this, three main research questions were proposed: RQ1: What type of news

content is being uploaded to YouTube and how does its topic and format relate to types of user engagement with the videos?; RQ2: What role does the use of emotion in YouTube video titles play in the levels of user engagement?; RQ3: Do user comments reflect Habermas' notion of the public sphere?

In order to answer these questions, a mixed methods approach was adopted by using both a content analysis and a sentiment analysis. Both these methodological approaches help provide data towards answering particular aspects of each research question. The reason why a content analysis was chosen was due to the nature of data that was being collected in that it required a systematic approach in order to quantify relevant and unambiguous features (Deacon et al, 2007). By being able to quantify these features, one should, according to Neuendorf (2002) not only be able to make some inferences about the data but also some limited predictions as well. The reason why sentiment analysis was chosen was that it allowed the generation of interpretable data that could be derived from short bits of media text, in this case, the titles of YouTube videos.

After the data collection process had been completed by following the coding framework laid out above, a total of 1239 videos were coded over two 1 week periods.

## **CHAPTER 5: Trends across all YouTube channels**

### **5.1: Introduction**

The intent of this chapter is to demonstrate that there are clear trends in the consumption and engagement with news videos on YouTube. The specific areas that will be covered are the links between topic and engagement, format and engagement, topic and format, user generated content and engagement and finally, between the language used in the titles of videos and engagement. By being able to establish these links, this chapter approach answering various aspects of both RQ1 and RQ2 proposed in the methodology

One of the reasons for looking at the link between topics and engagement is that previous research by Uribe & Gunter (2007), has shown that sensational stories, that is to say ones that have dramatic content within them, whilst not necessarily having a greater capacity to elicit an emotional reaction from an audience in general, on the subjects of crime in particular as well as political stories, there are “clear manifestations of the presence of high and low emotion-laden attributes” (2007: 207). It can be argued then, that the like and dislike buttons on YouTube are one way in which a viewer can express their reaction to a video and whilst the binary option presented to them offers little nuance, it does allow them to express at least some form of reaction. With this in mind, if one is to consider terrorism as an extreme criminal act, Uribe and Gunter’s research would support the idea that the topic of terrorism would elicit the greatest amount of engagement by the audience.

Benefiting the public sphere, as discussed in chapter 1, is one of the main roles in journalism and one aspect of this is generating discussion about various news events by encouraging audience participation. Due to this it is important to consider the link between the format of presentation and user engagement. This is because past research suggests that there is a parasocial interaction between the public and on-screen personas of the media (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The “style of behavior and conversational communication delivery by the persona, and the efficacious use of

production features” (Pellizzaro & Gimbal, 2018: 4) can all play a role in how an audience engages with the media. This would suggest that the more conversational approaches to presenting news content, such as roundtable discussions may be more likely to generate user engagement.

As discussed in chapter 3, the process of online content being shared across multiple platforms is sometimes referred to as “cross-pollination”, a term coined by Jain et al (2013). In their study they looked at how content from social media platforms, YouTube being one of them, diffused onto Twitter. They found that the popularity of content on one platform, did not dictate that it would also be popular on Twitter. Other studies by Myers et al. (2012) and Kim et al. (2014) further confirm that whilst there is indeed a level of cross-pollination or interconnectedness between various online platforms, there is no clear indication that content that is popular on one platform would gain traction on another platform. Research in this area is rapidly growing and with combined forces of both the growth in the power of new social media platforms to share content like WhatsApp (Benton, 2014) and the uptake of these platforms by traditional media outlets means more insight into how popularity on one platform translates or transfers onto another will increase. It is due to this climate in communications research that it can be considered important to look at what factors may be at play in relation to the popularity or levels of user engagement when it comes to YouTube videos. Therefore, one of the final sections of this chapter intends to look at how the language used in the titles of videos may play a role.

However, before attempting to answer these research questions, it is worthwhile to give an overview of the data collected for this research as a whole, primarily to introduce and explain the key variables being looked at.

## **5.2: Overview of the data**

In the process of the data collection, 1239 YouTube videos on YouTube’s website were analysed from five news networks, these being CNN, Fox News, BBC, Al Jazeera

English and The Young Turks. The videos were collected during two separate weeks, the week commencing 01.05.15 and the week commencing 08.11.15. All of the videos uploaded by the five networks during those weeks were included in the analysis. Each video was analysed according to 15 distinct variables which were chosen based on the pragmatic use of recording such variables so that they could be used and analysed against one another. There are a number of trends that can be pulled out from the data due to the large number of variables and to begin with the larger, more prima facie trends will be discussed.

Of the videos analysed, CNN and Fox News combined made up over two thirds of the total videos analysed, 840 (Table 5.1). The BBC made up only 3.6% of the total number of videos at 45, and whilst this is not an insignificant number, it is worth noting that this would lessen any future conclusions drawn being applied to the BBC simply due to the small sample size they provided.

Table 5.1: Total number of videos uploaded by each network

<b>Network</b>	<b>Number observed</b>	<b>Percent observed</b>
AJE	227	18.32%
BBC	45	3.63%
CNN	531	42.86%
Fox News	309	24.94%
TYT	127	10.25%
Total	1239	100%

The format of reporting done across all of the dataset shared a somewhat similar breakdown compared to the network breakdown. Videos that were in a ‘produced segment’ format, that is ones in which the content is presented in a pre-recorded, pre-edited news story, usually by a reporter, with the use of pre-made graphics and sound, made up almost 40% of the total number of videos. ‘One to one’ interviews were the second most frequently used format with 27.5% (Table 5.2). The least used format overall was live reporting.

Table 5.2: Total number of videos uploaded by the type of format used in each video

<b>Format</b>	<b>Number observed</b>	<b>Percent observed</b>
1 to 1	341	27.52%
Live reporting	38	3.07%
Monologue	175	14.12%
Produced segment	476	38.42%
Round table	209	16.87%
Total	1239	100%

The topic of discussion across all of the networks focussed most on the issues of domestic politics and crime, with all of the other topics having fewer than 150 videos each (Table 5.3). There is arguably two main causes for these two topics to dominate the network's YouTube channels. For crime, a large proportion of the videos were about the rioting and protests being held in Baltimore during the first week of data collection. As this was a major news story that dominated the headlines in America during that time and the fact that the majority of stories regarding this event were around the issues of criminality and police conduct, this could explain why there is a large number of crime focussed stories in relation to the entire data set. A reason why domestic politics was the most prominent topic discussed may be down to the choice of networks being looked at. With CNN and Fox uploading the most videos during the data collection (Table 5.1), the fact they are both American 24 hour cable news channels operating during an election season, means they are more likely to focus on campaign stories.

Table 5.3: Total number of videos uploaded by topic of each video

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Number observed</b>	<b>Percent observed</b>
Advert	41	3.31%
Business	25	2.02%
Crime	179	14.45%
Domestic Politics	360	29.06%
Education	32	2.58%
Entertainment	70	5.65%
Health	46	3.71%
International News	142	11.46%
International Politics	82	6.62%
Media	53	4.28%
Misc	103	8.31%
Tech/Science	34	2.74%
Terrorism	62	5.00%
Weather	10	0.81%
Total	1239	100%

Another broad trend is that user generated content is not very likely to be used. Of the 1239 videos only 149, or 12% contained any user generated content. A large proportion of the UGC was either cell phone footage about the Baltimore protests and the events that caused those protests or tweets and Facebook posts that relate to the story in a video. Although initially this trend may seem surprising owing to the nature of YouTube content in general, the fact that the channels looked at are well established news networks with, apart from The Young Turks, a large infrastructure, they do not need to rely on UGC to produce content and hence only need to use it when the UGC in question is unique and unobtainable any other way.

Further trends to point out are those of 'views', 'likes', 'dislikes' and 'comments' for each video. The average number of views per video across the entire sample was 18874, the median was 2528 and the mode was 1439. This shows that there are small portion of videos with significantly large viewing figures.

There are similar trends when it comes to likes and dislikes where there are a small number of videos with a large number of likes and dislikes that pulls up the average for each variable to 241 and 56 respectively. What is interesting here is that it appears viewers tend to like a video more than dislike it. What this indicates is something that will be discussed later as on face value the like to dislike ratio does not tell us a great deal beyond how many viewers clicked the corresponding button. When it comes to comments, they also follow a similar trend to those just mentioned.

The final variable to give a general overview to is that of the tags for each video. One of the reasons to look at tags is to track the most covered events or news stories during the data collection and so that in later analysis, comparisons could be made between various events despite these events having the same topic. Overall, almost 50% of the videos analysed were standalone videos that did not link to any specific trending story at the time. The single most used tag was '2016 election' which was assigned to 23.7% of all videos. This was somewhat expected due to the general focus across the networks being on domestic politics as mentioned above. With America at the start of an election cycle during the period of data collection, the heavy focus on political stories relating to the election is expected. The second most used tag was 'Baltimore' which was in relation to stories that focussed on the events in that city, namely the police abuse issues and resulting protests, that occurred. A total of 95, or 7.6% of videos related to this event. One other tag to make note of here is 'Paris' which was for any stories relating to the terrorist attack that happened in Paris on November 13th. Whilst the tag was only assigned to 4% of the total videos analysed, it's important to point out that the event happened at the very end of the period of data collection and had this period been extended for another week, one can assume that the percent of videos assigned with this tag would be significantly higher.

As stated at the start of this chapter, its purpose was to present data that various metrics on YouTube can have an impact on the levels of engagement on videos uploaded onto the platform. The data presented so far has inspected each of the



variables measured during data collection individually. This was done to introduce the relevant metrics and lay the groundwork for the forthcoming discussions. Whilst some trends can be pulled out from looking at each variable on its own, as had been demonstrated thus far, in order to fully explore and understand the data in this chapter, one must consider how the variables interact with one another. Hence, discussion will now turn to the interactions between various variables and whether the research questions can be answered, hence building towards a case that various metrics on YouTube can have an impact on the levels of engagement on videos on YouTube.

### **5.3: Topic and user engagement**

One of the areas this thesis was interested in was the potential link between the topic of news being presented and the levels of user engagement with them. Due to the multifaceted interests of any given society, one would expect that certain topics of news are more popular and hence engaged with more than others. With the idea that a healthy democratic society has a fully functioning public sphere in which the public engage with all “matters of general interest.” (Habermas, 1964: 49), it is crucial to consider the relationship between the topic of news content and the extent to which the public engages with it.

Initially just looking views, the most passive forms of user engagement, one can see that the most viewed topic on average across all five networks was terrorism with just over 70,000 views per video (Table 5.4). Not only did terrorism have the highest number of views on average, it also had the highest number of comments with 435 and dislikes with 212. The only variable that it did not rank highest was in likes, where it only had the 6th highest on average across videos covering that topic.

Table 5.4: Average number of views a video received per topic as well as the standard deviation for each topic and total number of videos that covered each topic

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>StDev</b>	<b>Number observed</b>
Advert	3,987	9,170	41
Business	5,208	17,278	25
International Politics	6,849	25,344	82
Health	8,103	28,778	46
International News	10,136	23,173	142
Weather	11,148	18,606	10
Tech/Science	12,244	22,770	34
Entertainment	13,288	40,885	70
Crime	17,913	40,538	179
Media	18,835	37,489	53
Domestic Politics	19,458	39,538	360
Education	20,219	39,106	32
Misc	28,300	52,280	103
Terrorism	70,604	117,950	62

As to the relationship between all topics and whether they receive a similar level of engagement across the four variables of likes, dislikes, comments and views one can see in Table 5.5 that the rank, that being how each topic fared against each other by variable seems somewhat consistent. Every topic aside from business and international politics has its own median rank. These rankings lead one to think that there is a correlation between the number of views, likes, dislikes and comments.

Table 5.5: How each topic performed against each other by engagement variable as well as it's average rank of all four variables combined

Topic ranking						
Topic	Likes	Dislikes	Comments	Views	Average rank	Median rank
Terrorism	6	1	1	1	1	1
Misc	1	3	2	2	2	2
Media	2	2	3	5	3	3
Education	3	4	4	3	4	4
Domestic Politics	4	5	6	4	5	5
Crime	5	7	5	6	6	6
Entertainment	9	6	9	7	7	7
Tech/Science	7	8	8	8	8	8
International						
News	11	10	11	10	10	10
Health	8	13	7	11	10	11
Business	10	12	10	13	12	12
International						
Politics	12	11	12	12	12	12
Advert	14	9	13	14	12	13
Weather	13	14	14	9	12	14

One way in which the link between each of the variable can be further established is through looking at scatterplot charts in which each of the variables are measured against each other. As can be seen in charts 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3, there is clear evidence to suggest that the more views a video receives, the more likes, dislikes and comments it will receive.

Chart 5.1: Scatterplot chart showing the number of views each video received by the number of likes each video received.

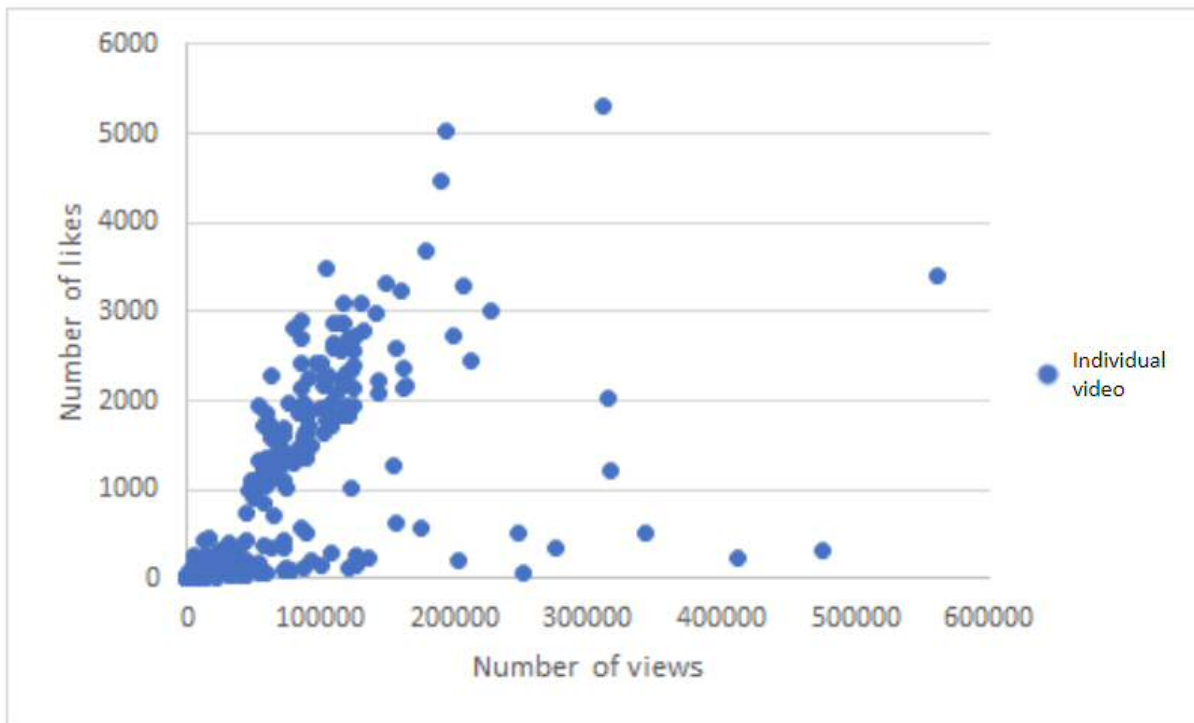


Chart 5.2: Scatterplot chart showing the number of views each video received by the number of dislikes each video received.

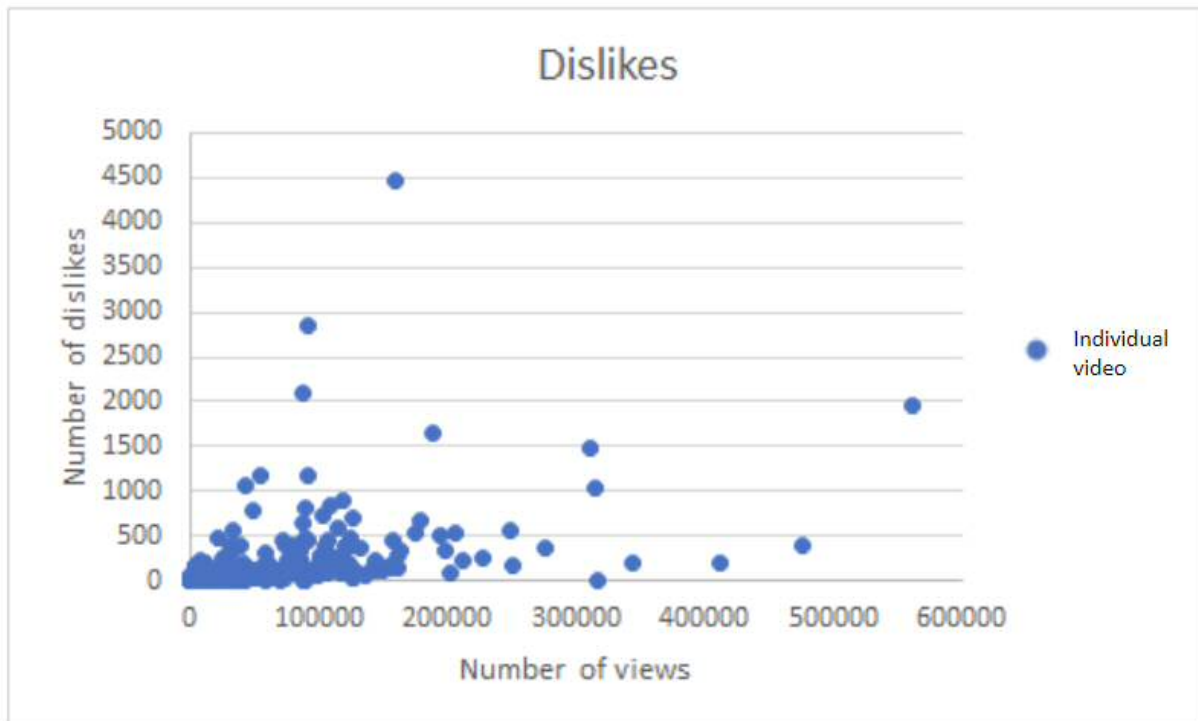
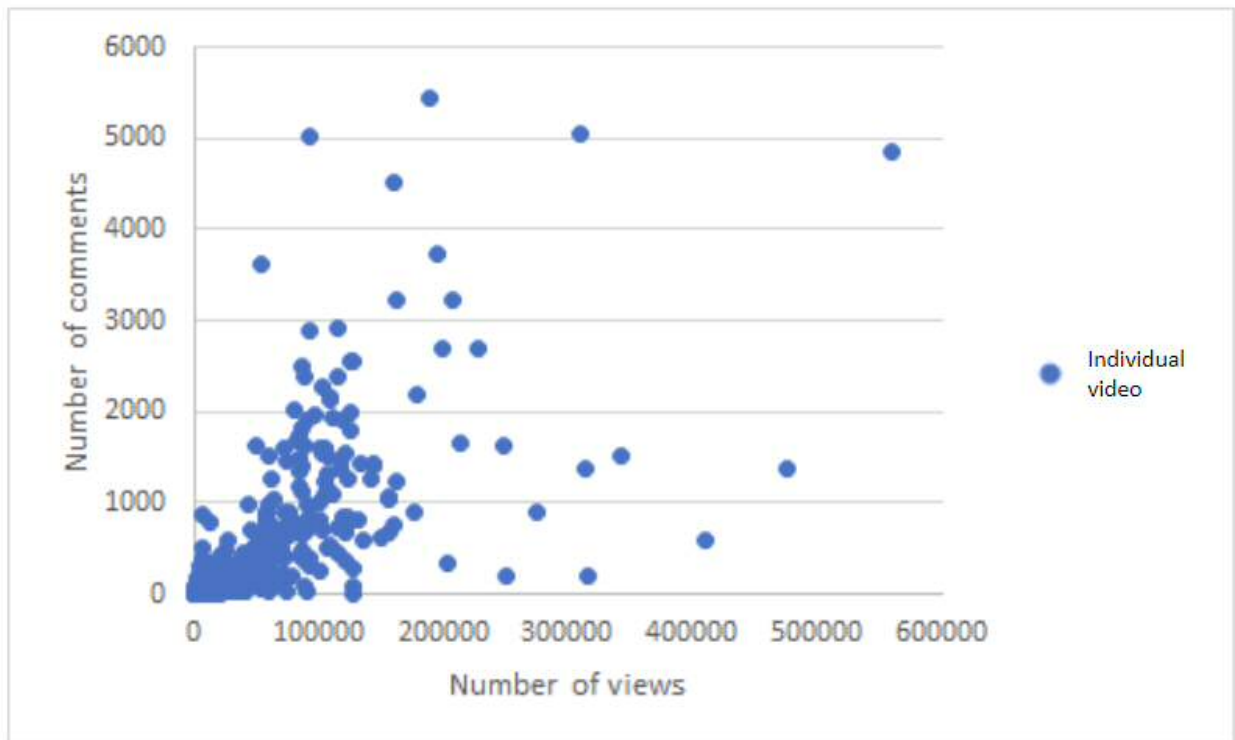


Chart 5.3: Scatterplot chart showing the number of views each video received by the number of comments each video received.



From the data gathered, one could say that there is indeed a relationship between the topic being discussed in a video and the number of likes, dislikes, comments and views a video receives. Good examples of this are three videos by CNN on the topic of terrorism, specifically the attacks in Paris. Videos 'New video of Swat team storming The Bataclan', 'Paris shooting survivor: It was 'a bloodbath'' and 'Report: People killed, injured in Paris shooting' all had relatively high, yet similar number of views, comments, likes and dislikes. This data lends support to Shoemaker's (1996) model of news values in which it is theorized that the public pays more attention to events that are both deviant and socially significant.

Similarly at the other end of the spectrum videos 'Bush vs. Rubio: A tale of two heat maps', 'Gretchen's Take: FBN debate was about candidates, policies' and 'Rating the performance of GOP debate moderators' which all covered the topic of media, had a

relatively low and similar number of views, comments, likes and dislikes. In all three of these cases they had fewer than 100 views.

One interesting example to highlight is by TYT which is entitled 'Woman Freaks Out Over Gay Soup Ad'. This is in the miscellaneous topic category and as can be seen in Table 5.2, the average number of views for videos in this category is 28,300. However, the video has nearly 194,376 views as well as 3726 comments, 5035 likes and 515 dislikes. All of these are far higher than the average for videos in the miscellaneous category. However, other videos in that same category such as 'Kimberly's OMT: Honoring our veterans' has only 158 views, 2 likes and no comments or dislikes. Similar instances of extremes can be found in other topic categories as well. What this indicates is that when looking at relationships between the topic of a video and the amount of user engagement it has, one must be mindful of looking at individual examples or small groups as individual videos may in fact be outliers and hence must be looked at alongside a larger sample of videos within that topic.

The motivations that go into a viewer deciding whether to like or dislike a video is a subjective one that is wholly dependent upon the context and content of the video being viewed as well as the individual's reaction to said video.

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, past research by Uribe and Gunter (2007) indicated that news stories with sensational or dramatic content are more likely to elicit an emotional response by an audience. Due to this it was suspected that topics like terrorism would generate the greatest number of user engagements. The evidence from the data suggests that this is indeed the case with terrorism focussed videos garnering on average the most number views, comments and dislikes. Whilst videos on the topic of terrorism did not elicit the highest number of likes on average per video, this is likely due to the context and content of the video being hard to 'like'. This is a key finding in two regards. Firstly, not only does it address the part of RQ1 that is concerned with how the topic of a news video on YouTube is related to the levels of user engagement, but it also lends support to the idea that YouTube as a platform is not vastly different from

other media formats at least in regard to this specific area. This speaks towards aspects of Jenkins' (2004) concept of media convergence in that the trends in the cultural consumption (Garcia Canclini, 2008) can be seen to be similar across various platforms. Secondly, the fact that a generally unpleasant topic such as terrorism does not generate the same number of likes as it does in other manners of user engagement, suggests that there is greater nuance required in the understanding of what makes a user decide to 'like' a video. Although there is existing research relating to the appeal of horror (Tudor, 2010) and how news organisations tend to push more negative news stories under the guiding idea of 'if it bleeds, it leads' (Kupchick & Bracy, 2009; Melkote, 2009; Dimitrova et al, 2005), future work must be considered in relation to the appeal of bad news videos on YouTube and what makes people 'like' them.

#### **5.4: Format and user engagement**

According to the data, out of the five formats looked at, roundtable discussions averaged the highest number of views, comments, likes and dislikes. The format with the lowest average across the four variables was produced segment videos. Also notable between these two formats is that they each have the highest and lowest standard deviation across the variable respectively. When looking at Table 5.6 one can see that for the roundtable discussion videos, there were a larger number of outlier videos with extreme levels of engagement, whereas in produced segment videos, the amount of engagement per variable is similar to one another.

Table 5.6: Average and standard deviation of views, comments, likes and dislikes per video by each format recorded as well as total number of videos observed per format

Type of user engagement	Format	Mean	StDev	Number observed
<b>Views</b>	Produced segment	6,578	15,085	476
	1 to 1	13,844	35,892	341
	Monologue	30,552	67,527	175
	Live reporting	32,403	68,904	38
	Round table	42,318	65,515	209
<b>Comments</b>	Produced segment	36	67	476
	Live reporting	119	197	38
	1 to 1	150	446	341
	Monologue	339	778	175
	Round table	493	837	209
<b>Likes</b>	Produced segment	40	69	476
	Live reporting	62	74	38
	1 to 1	170	568	341
	Monologue	436	938	175
	Round table	683	936	209
<b>Dislikes</b>	Produced segment	16	42	476
	1 to 1	39	98	341
	Live reporting	41	68	38
	Monologue	91	223	175
	Round table	150	439	209

The data in the table above shows that round table discussions tend to generate greater amounts of user engagement with monologues being the second highest, which would lend support to the idea that presentation formats that allow for greater parasocial interactions tend to generate more user engagement and hence enhance the public sphere more. By feeling that there is some form of relationship or bond between themselves and the news presenter, an audience member is more likely to interact with that content (Rihi & Wegner, 2017). However, it does not indicate that this is the sole reason in determining the level of user engagement a video will receive. To highlight



this, if one looks at the top ten and bottom ten videos in terms of any of the variables of user engagement, there is an even spread in the format being used. What this therefore suggests is that the format that the news is presented in has little to no impact on the level of user engagement that it generates on its own, but when considered alongside other factors such as the topic of the content then it may play an enhancing role.

To illustrate the fact that format by itself has little impact on the levels of user engagement, one can look at some of the videos that whilst having a very low number of views, even for their given format, also happen to have a high level of engagement in terms of comments or likes. One such example is 'Gretchen's Take: A win for traditional holiday displays' which whilst being a monologue, only has 559 views yet also has 38 comments. Similarly, 'Bush vs. Rubio: A tale of two heat maps' has only 10 views yet has 3 comments, 3 likes and 5 dislikes.

What the data suggests is that whilst there may be some relationship between the format of the news being discussed and the levels of engagement it is certainly not the main determining factor. Roundtable discussions appear to generate noticeably more engagements than produced segments, thereby implying that the format for the news being discussed is a factor.

### **5.5: Topic and format**

This section looks at whether cumulatively the networks tend to use one particular format when covering any of the recorded topics such as whether monologues were used more frequently when covering education videos for example. If there is a relationship, this would contribute towards the idea that there is not one single variable that dictates user engagement with a video as they would all, or at least in the case of topic and format, be linked to one another and hence influence one another.

One of the relationships regarding these two variables that sticks out from the data is between live reporting and crime related videos. Whilst crime related videos made up

14.4% of the total number of videos analysed (Table 5.7), they made up 55% of all the videos that had a live reporting format whereas across the other formats, crime videos only accounted for between 10 to 13% of the total for each format. Other notable data points in relation to the link between topic and format, is that for 1 to 1, monologue and roundtable formats, domestic politics was the single largest topic for each of them with 45%.

Table 5.7: Total number of videos for each topic, by the format they were presented in.

<b>Format</b>	<b>Advert</b>	<b>Business</b>	<b>Crime</b>	<b>Domestic Politics</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Entertainment</b>	<b>Health</b>
<b>1 to 1</b>	0	6	51	141	9	21	17
<b>Live reporting</b>	0	0	21	3	0	0	0
<b>Monologue</b>	0	0	17	78	4	3	0
<b>Produced segment</b>	41	18	63	43	9	40	21
<b>Round table</b>	0	1	27	95	10	6	8
<b>Total</b>	41	25	179	360	32	70	46
	3.31%	2.02%	14.45%	29.06%	2.58%	5.65%	3.71%
<b>Format</b>	<b>International News</b>	<b>International Politics</b>	<b>Media</b>	<b>Misc</b>	<b>Tech/Science</b>	<b>Terrorism</b>	<b>Weather</b>
<b>1 to 1</b>	19	20	15	17	6	18	1
<b>Live reporting</b>	3	1	0	1	0	9	0
<b>Monologue</b>	11	5	18	21	3	13	2
<b>Produced segment</b>	95	43	11	49	17	19	7
<b>Round table</b>	14	13	9	15	8	3	0
<b>Total</b>	142	82	53	103	34	62	10
	11.46%	6.62%	4.28%	8.31%	2.74%	5.00%	0.81%

Overall, it appears that there is no link between the topic and format being used. Whilst there does seem to be some tendency for the networks to use live reporting for crime as

stated above, there does not seem to be any other noticeable trends. A possible case could be made for international news focussed stories being more likely to be given a produced segment format as it makes up 20% of the videos with that format which is substantially higher than in the other formats. However, it is not clear from the data collected that there is enough evidence to suggest that there is a link between the topics being discussed in a YouTube video and the format that is used to present it.

### **5.6: User generated content and user engagement**

Although YouTube is a platform built for the purpose of sharing user generated content, this section is specifically looking at whether or not news networks using the platform have any greater success, that being the amount of engagement a video receives, with their own videos if they utilise UGC within their own videos.

From the data gathered there are two key aspects to note. The first is that UGC was only used in 12% data sample. This means that if UGC were to have any impact in any way on other variables, it would only do so on a relatively small amount. The lack of presence of UGC on videos uploaded by established news organisations does have ramifications for future research as with YouTube becoming more professionalised and dominated by already established brands (Kim, 2012), then the role that YouTube plays in enhancing the public sphere through the empowerment of members of the public is called into question.

The second aspect to note is that it would appear that the use of UGC has a very limited effect on the four variables of engagement. The data shows that having UGC does on average lead to a higher number of views and a higher number of comments (Table 5.8). A video containing UGC will on average have just under 3000 more views and 30 more comments, or 1.15 times the number of views and comments that a video that does not. However, for the variables of likes and dislikes, having UGC in a video has a negative effect on these variables with the number of likes being 0.95 times the average and the number of dislikes being 0.78 times the average. An important aspect to note is

that these numbers do not factor in the title of the videos. This is important as the audience is unlikely to know whether a video has UGC in it or not and hence choose to engage with it. For example, the title of the video ‘Baltimore officer: Freddie Gray’s knife was illegal’ gives no indication that the video contains user generated content. Other videos such as ‘Miami Cop Brutally Assaults Handcuffed Woman [VIDEO]’ contain a clear indicator to the potential viewer that the YouTube video is likely to contain additional video content not produced by the news organisation that has uploaded the video, in this case, TYT. Due to this, the significance of having UGC in a video does fall into question.

Table 5.8: Average number of views, comments, likes and dislikes per video as well as total number and percent observed

Type of user engagement	Contains UGC	Mean	Number observed	Percent Observed
Views	No	18,437	1,090	88%
	Yes	21,326	149	12%
Comments	No	186	1,090	88%
	Yes	215	149	12%
Likes	No	242	1,090	88%
	Yes	231	149	12%
Dislikes	No	58	1,090	88%
	Yes	45	149	12%
<b>Total for each variable</b>			1,239	100%

However, the actual content of the UGC that is being used is more likely to have an impact than the fact it is being used in the first place. As stated in the coding guide, UGC includes things such as “Facebook posts and tweets” as well as mobile phone footage etc. Some UGC taking the form of a video of a riot or a natural disaster is likely to have a greater impact on the engagement variables than a single tweet or Facebook

post. Two videos that highlight this point are 'Racial incidents reported on several campuses' and '#AnswerMann -- Answering viewer questions'. The first video contains footage filmed on a mobile phone showing students conducting racial chants on a bus. The latter video contains a tweet from a member of the public asking a question to the shows anchor. Both videos are from CNN and both are produced segments however the video containing the more sensational UGC received 109 comments, 31 likes and 69 dislikes compared to the sedated UGC of a viewer's tweet in the other video which only received 2 comments, 7 likes and 10 dislikes.

Overall the data suggests that the mere use of UGC in a video does not have any large impact on the level of engagement with a video. What is more apparent is that it is the type of UGC that is used that would be a greater factor in determining the strength of engagement from the audience

### **5.7: YouTube titles and user engagement**

As outlined in the literature review, the use of language is very important to journalism as it is language that helps frame the issues that are being presented by any news organisation. The use of sensationalist or 'clickbaity' headlines is an effective means of getting an audience's attention (Pengnate, 2019, Bhowmik et al, 2019) and hence getting them to engage with the public sphere in some form. Due to this, RQ2 which is concerned with the role that emotional language plays in the levels of user engagement was asked, in order to explore this relationship further.

Measuring emotion is a tricky matter and one that can be done in a number of different ways. To answer the question of whether the titles used for each news video on YouTube can have any impact on the engagement of that video one must have a quantifiable means of doing so. As detailed in chapter 4, this study used the sentiment analysis program SentiStrength which has been used in various other academic studies that focus on social media and comments (Thelwall, Buckley & Paltoglou, 2011). This program helps break down the title of each video into a positive and negative sentiment

score based not only on the words used, but the sentence structure and punctuation as well.

Before exploring the links between the sentiment expressed in the title of a video and the levels of user engagement, there are some other trends in the data that are worth noting. Firstly, across all 1239 videos in the dataset, the average sentiment expressed in the titles was -0.54. This means that the overall language to describe the news videos on YouTube by the 5 networks analysed was slightly negative in nature. When one looks at the average sentiment for each network (Table 5.9), it can be seen that the range of sentiment goes from -0.31 with Fox News, to -1.08 with TYT. The potential reasons for this difference will be explored in chapter 6.

Table 5.9: Average sentiment in video titles for each network as well as the total number observed per network

<b>Network</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Number observed</b>
AJE	-0.687	227
BBC	-0.578	45
CNN	-0.473	531
Fox News	-0.314	309
TYT	-1.079	127

When looking at title sentiment by the topic of each video (Table 5.10), there are some unsurprising trends in the data. The two topics with the most negative sentiment score on their videos were the ones on terrorism with -1.68 and crime with -0.98. Due to the nature of these topics, one would expect the titles of these video to carry a greater number of negatively connotative words. Words such as “deadly”, “killed”, “fear” and “attacks” appear in many of the videos on terrorism and these words have a large impact on the overall sentiment of a title. To illustrate this point, video ID1142 has the title “Deadly suicide attack rocks southern Beirut”. In SentiStrength, the first three words

of the title generate a negative sentiment score and the fact they are chained together further increases the negative score to a total of -3.

Table 5.10: Average sentiment in video titles for each topic as well as the total number observed per topic

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Number observed</b>
Advert	-0.073	41
Business	-0.320	25
Crime	-0.983	179
Domestic Politics	-0.278	360
Education	-0.625	32
Entertainment	-0.300	70
Health	-0.478	46
International News	-0.852	142
International Politics	-0.293	82
Media	-0.491	53
Misc	-0.291	103
Tech/Science	-0.118	34
Terrorism	-1.677	62
Weather	-0.800	10

At the other end of the scale, videos which were adverts for other shows had the least negative sentiment score of -0.07. Whilst it is still negative, the fact that it is the least negative out of all of the topics should not be surprising as these videos are actively looking to promote the network they are on.

From studying all of the data, it appears that there is indeed some relationship between the sentiment of the video's title and the amount of audience engagement there is. Across all four measures of engagement, views, comment, likes and dislikes, the data suggests that videos with a greater negatively sentimented title attract more of each of

those measurements. Whilst the correlation is weak, and notably even weaker for the measurement of likes, there does seem to be some relationship.

Looking at the total number of videos that have a particularly high individual positive sentiment (above 3) and a high individual negative sentiment (-4 and below), one sees that there are a greater number of videos with high negative sentiment, 69, than there are those with a high positive sentiment, 50. If the range of high individual negative sentiment is broadened to include videos with a score of -3 and below there are in fact 255 videos. This again adds to the notion that news coverage by the networks in this study tend to frame their videos in a more negative than positive way.

The reason for why this trend is unsurprising is due to previous studies linking negative news coverage to greater interest and engagement than more positive stories. Studies by Trussler & Soroka (2014) and Robinson (2007) show that audiences tend to gravitate towards not only more negative topics as Robinson showed, but also towards stories that are framed negatively as shown by Trussler & Soroka.

One interesting aspect to consider in particular is the difference between likes and dislikes in relation to a videos sentiment score. When examining the relationship with likes, one sees that videos that have an overall positive sentiment score received far fewer likes than those that had an overall negative sentiment score. It would seem then that the language that is used in a video's title does have some impact upon the degree to which the audience will engage with it.

### **5.8: Further discussion**

From the data analysed, one can reflect on the overall picture that has been painted and place it in context with other works in this area by considering how the data helps answer research questions 1 and 2 proposed in this study.



It has been argued that hard news topics such as politics or international affairs are often more negative in nature than soft news topics (Soroka, 2015). With this in mind, it is no surprise that the data in this study shows that videos covering the topics of crime, international news and terrorism had on average the titles with the most negatively sentimented language. Although this is not the only reason for videos on these topics to have negative sentiments, others being that some networks may have more negatively titled videos in general and happen to also cover these three topics the most, a case can be made that the data shows a clear link between topic and the level of negativity in any videos title.

However, some of the data does go against the notion that hard news is more negative in nature as both domestic and international politics, whilst still having overall negatively titled videos, -0.278 and -0.293, the average for these two topics was less negative than the average across all topics, -0.54. There are a few potential explanations for this. The first one is simply due to the sample of videos that was chosen, and it just happened to be that of those videos that were dealing with domestic and international politics, this sample group was less negative than potential other sample groups. Another explanation is that of the networks looked at, they do not choose to frame, whether conscious or unconsciously, such topics negatively. A third factor that may explain this is the nature of the domestic politics videos, in that a large portion of them in the data set were dealing with the American 2016 election campaign which has been deemed by many to be an exceedingly untraditional campaign season (Seib, 2015; Kay, 2016). Due to this perception, news organisations may be framing such stories in a different way. Despite this factor, it could be seen as contributing towards the notion of media hybridity in that news organisations appear to be applying similar news values across all their content output. Whether it is one of these reasons or a combination of others, the trend in this data set is certainly something that further research should look into as to whether or not, at least on online video platforms, the hard news topics of domestic and international politics are having different frames or news values placed upon them compared to either their other platform counterparts or their historical counterparts such as videos from the 2008 US election.

Another area of discussion can be had around how the data did not show any correlation between the format of the videos and the amount of engagement that they received. There are large bodies of work dedicated to the impact the framing of news stories can have on an audience. Some work suggests that format can play a key role in regards to an audience's ability to recall the story (Van Der Molen & Van Der Voort, 2009) as well as having a role in shaping the audience's attitude to the story in question (Oliver et al., 2012). However other research suggests that format does not play that large a role in determining the amount of engagement an audience has with a story (Guerrazzi et al., 2016). In Guerrazzi's study, one of the hypotheses tested was whether the format of an online video would be a significant predictor in the amount of time spent viewing a news video. The study found that there "was no relationship between format and time spent viewing a story" (2016: 9).

Despite the earlier point being made that the data in this study lends support to Shoemaker's (1996) model of news values, Guerrazzi's findings along with the data in this study relating to the use of different formats, should force future research to consider the extent to which the manner in which a story is presented factors into the levels of audience attention when considering news values that are associated with deviance and social significance. One cannot exclude however, the idea that format plays no role in determining engagement. There are a number of variables that were not accounted for in the data that could show some level of impact. Among these variables is the effect each format had on each individual topic as for example, a live report may have a greater impact on engagement for the topic of terrorism than the format of a round table discussion. Another variable unaccounted for is the news anchor/journalist in the video. Some anchors may excel in a monologue format, regardless of topic and through their delivery of the news, may cause an audience to engage more, than an anchor who does not excel in a monologue format. An example to illustrate this notion is that for Fox News, a number of their videos in which they use a monologue format have the anchors name in the video. The video titled "Kurtz: The media's 'thug' fixation" alludes to the fact that the anchor Howard Kurtz is delivering the monologue, something

that he frequently does on his show. The video itself whilst only receiving just 1031 views, in terms of active engagement it received 18 comments, 25 likes and 8 dislikes which is far higher than what would be expected with that relatively low number of views. This among a number of other cases highlights how the impact of the format of a video may depend more on the person delivering the news in that format rather than the format itself. The success of a news video being more dependent on the deliverer rather than the format or topic is certainly an area that requires further academic research.

Another area worth noting upon is the nature of user generated content and its use by the news networks looked at in this study. The premise of YouTube is to allow “billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos.” (YouTube, 2016). For the vast majority of the videos analysed, the notion of originally created videos is not true as for Fox News, CNN, Al Jazeera and the BBC nearly all of their videos are segments taken from their TV channel which links back to the ideas of cross pollination and a hybrid media system discussed in chapter 3. The reason this is worth commenting upon is that the original premise of YouTube seems somewhat different when it comes to the genre of news videos. Whilst the elements of discovery, watching and sharing are all there, it seems that the established news networks see it as a platform where original content is not necessary and that it is simply another platform from which their TV content can be watched and shared. Jin Kim has suggested, that the “evolution of YouTube from an amateur-driven medium to a professional-dominated channel coexists with the market expansion of the TV industry into the web.” (2012: 61). What this proposes is a move from user generated content to professionally created content. The convergence between professionally created content and an amateur-driven medium suggests that the role of UGC is somewhat different when it comes to its use by large organisations. The blurring of lines between professional content and amateur appears to be happening on YouTube.

## **CHAPTER 6: Trends with individual networks and branding**

### **6.1: Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how each of the news organisations analysed in this thesis display particular traits that make their YouTube channel unique in some way. This will be done by presenting some of the data collected and discussing it around the concepts of the breadth of topics covered, the concept of viewership and the notion of branding. It is important to make these distinctions as scholars have argued that the news media is becoming homogenized in the content it is producing (Groshek, 2008; Boczkowski, 2010; Boczkowski & Santos, 2007). With each network starting to use the platform between 2005 and 2006, one may expect that their success on the platform would be somewhat similar. However as will be shown in the data collected, this has not been the case and this may be due to the distinct traits that each one manifests. The discussions in this chapter also geared towards both research questions 1 and 2, but unlike the previous chapter, will be approaching them from the perspective of the individual organisations rather than the news media as a whole.

With the contexts and justifications for why each organisation was chosen for this study being discussed in the methodology of this study in mind, one can proceed to analyse some of the trends for each network in regards to the videos analysed in this study. To begin with, one can compare the range of topics covered by each of the networks. It is important to consider the breadth of coverage that each of the networks provides as this may have implications regarding further discussions as if certain topics are neglected for example, then not only may this mean that any general conclusions drawn later in this analysis would have to be tempered when it came to those neglected topics, but it also would speak towards any arguments being made regarding the organisations in question contribution towards the public sphere.

## **6.2: Breadth of topics covered**

Out of the 14 topics that were specifically accounted for, when viewed across all five of the networks combined, it would appear that there is indeed a broad and relatively balanced spread of topics covered. The balance is relative as whilst domestic politics and crime combined make up 43% (Table 5.3) of the total number of videos, there has been a precedent for cable news networks to focus more heavily on these topics (Jurkowitz et al., 2013). This trend is not just limited to national news or American news channels as studies by Brown & Roemer (2016) as well as Henderson (2014) show. Therefore, whilst it can be argued that there is indeed a broad range of topics covered by the networks, it is important to look at each specific network to see if by themselves they provide a broad range. The reason why this is important to consider is due to the existing research concerning the idea that audiences are becoming more siloed and selective in terms of their news consumption (Garrett, 2009b; Stroud, 2008) and that if it is the case that audiences are choosing to consume news from a limited pool of sources, then is it important to see whether or not these siloed audiences are at least receiving a broad range of news topics.

Looking at Al Jazeera English first, the most notable point about the breadth of its coverage of the 14 news topics is that there is a disproportionate focus on international news. Whilst international news made up 11.4% of the total news coverage across all of the networks, on AJE it accounted for 38% of that networks coverage (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Total count and percent of coverage given to each topic by AJE

Topic	Number observed	Percent observed
<b>Advert</b>	21	9.25%
<b>Business</b>	12	5.29%
<b>Crime</b>	11	4.85%
<b>Domestic Politics</b>	1	0.44%
<b>Education</b>	6	2.64%
<b>Entertainment</b>	10	4.41%
<b>Health</b>	2	0.88%
<b>International News</b>	86	37.89%
<b>International Politics</b>	42	18.50%
<b>Media</b>	9	3.96%
<b>Misc</b>	10	4.41%
<b>Tech/Science</b>	8	3.52%
<b>Terrorism</b>	7	3.08%
<b>Weather</b>	2	0.88%
<b>Total</b>	227	100.00%

Part of the explanation for this could be due to the structuring of the organisation in which it is the only major English speaking global news channel with its headquarters based in the Middle East, as well as maintain bureaus in places such as Gaza and Harare where other news networks do not. This, combined with one of the network's slogans 'Every Story, Every Side', implying that they wish to provide an alternative perspective than the Western centric one provided by other global news networks, would account for why they have a greater proportion of their content covering international news than other networks. Along with their higher rate of international news coverage, is the fact that videos that were adverts for other programs on the network made up 9% of its total videos which is three times greater than the average across all networks. With AJE having a much stronger focus on these two topics

compared to the other networks, it could be suggested that any future conclusions drawn about videos that cover these two topics, are much more applicable to AJE than the other networks.

CNN follows what other studies in the field would expect in terms of topic spread as it focuses most heavily on crime and domestic politics. Whilst domestic politics makes up a large portion of its total videos at 24% (Table 6.2), this is in fact below the combined network average of 29%. However when it comes to crime, whilst making up 25% of its total videos, this is significantly higher than the combined network average of 14%. CNN's strong focus on crime stories means that conclusions drawn about crime stories are potentially more applicable to this network than to the others. The other topics covered by CNN are relatively similar to the combined network average and so it could be said that it does provide a broad range of topics.

Table 6.2: Total count and percent of coverage given to each topic by CNN

Topic	Number observed	Percent observed
<b>Advert</b>	17	3.20%
<b>Business</b>	12	2.26%
<b>Crime</b>	132	24.86%
<b>Domestic Politics</b>	129	24.29%
<b>Education</b>	8	1.51%
<b>Entertainment</b>	49	9.23%
<b>Health</b>	14	2.64%
<b>International News</b>	39	7.34%
<b>International Politics</b>	21	3.95%
<b>Media</b>	3	0.56%
<b>Misc</b>	39	7.34%
<b>Tech/Science</b>	17	3.20%
<b>Terrorism</b>	43	8.10%
<b>Weather</b>	8	1.51%
<b>Total</b>	531	100.00%

When considering the BBC's content (Table 6.3), it follows a somewhat similar spread to the other networks. However, it is harder to derive strong conclusions as to whether the BBC covers a broad range of topics due to the small sample it has. It should be noted that the three networks mentioned so far have had the breadth of their coverage analysed in a study by Kenneth Loomis (2009) who did a content analysis of the three network's, world news web pages. Whilst a like for like comparison cannot be made between the webpage content and broadcast content, it is nonetheless noteworthy that Loomis found that the "networks covered essentially the same stories and quoted similar sources" (2009:143). This study, taken in conjunction with the discussion of the range of topics covered by the three networks mentioned thus far could lead one to conclude that if it is the case that CNN and AJE do in fact cover a broad range of topics,



then despite the low sample size for the BBC in this study, Loomis' research would suggest that it too would also cover a broad range of topics in its YouTube content. One way to test this would be to expand the data collection period of this study so as to collect a suitable number of BBC YouTube videos. By combining the results of this study along with Loomis' findings, the suggestion could be made that the media convergence that has been alluded to in other parts of this study is contributing towards the notion of the homogenization of news media alluded to at the start of this chapter. By highlighting how content between CNN, AJE and the BBC is similar on their websites and how this also then seems to be the case for their YouTube content, this seems to not only provide that it is the case that the news is becoming more homogenized, but that YouTube as a news platform is contributing towards this homogenization.

Table 6.3: Total count and percent of coverage given to each topic by the BBC

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Number observed</b>	<b>Percent observed</b>
<b>Advert</b>	0	0.00%
<b>Business</b>	0	0.00%
<b>Crime</b>	2	4.44%
<b>Domestic Politics</b>	12	26.67%
<b>Education</b>	0	0.00%
<b>Entertainment</b>	2	4.44%
<b>Health</b>	1	2.22%
<b>International News</b>	9	20.00%
<b>International Politics</b>	10	22.22%
<b>Media</b>	0	0.00%
<b>Misc</b>	8	17.78%
<b>Tech/Science</b>	0	0.00%
<b>Terrorism</b>	1	2.22%
<b>Weather</b>	0	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	45	100.00%

Fox News has three notable data trends in its range of coverage in comparison to the other networks. The most stark one is its significantly strong focus on domestic policy stories, which makes up over half of its total output with 54% (Table 6.4) which is far greater than the combined network average of 29%. The two other trends occur in two of the smaller topic categories of education and health, which made up 4% and 8% respectively of Fox's total output. These are both twice the combined network average for these topics. Whilst still relatively low in the total amount of videos, the fact that Fox News provides greater coverage to these two topics is worth noting for any future discussions when dealing with them.

Table 6.4: Total count and percent of coverage given to each topic by Fox News

Topic	Number observed	Percent observed
<b>Advert</b>	1	0.32%
<b>Business</b>	0	0.00%
<b>Crime</b>	15	4.85%
<b>Domestic Politics</b>	168	54.37%
<b>Education</b>	13	4.21%
<b>Entertainment</b>	4	1.29%
<b>Health</b>	26	8.41%
<b>International News</b>	4	1.29%
<b>International Politics</b>	7	2.27%
<b>Media</b>	32	10.36%
<b>Misc</b>	25	8.09%
<b>Tech/Science</b>	6	1.94%
<b>Terrorism</b>	8	2.59%
<b>Weather</b>	0	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	309	100.00%

Finally with The Young Turks, there are three noticeable aspects to the spread of topics that it covers. The first is that much like Fox News, domestic politics forms the most frequently covered topic by the network, with 39% (Table 6.5). Whilst the focus is not quite as strong as Fox's, it is still 10% higher than the combined network average. The second noticeable aspect is the proportion of videos that cover miscellaneous stories. This statistic is of particular note as TYT is considered to be a non-traditional news network and so it may be suggested that because of this, they are more likely to cover stories that fall outside of the remit of traditional news networks like the others in this study. When one takes a closer look at the miscellaneous videos by TYT, it is possible to draw together a theme that runs across these videos. The titles of many of these videos make reference or allude to religion, religious figures in society and LGBT issues. Examples such as 'Why YOU Have To Follow YOUR Religion And WE DON'T', 'Millionaire Pastor Said Jesus Doesn't Want You To Know How Much Money He Has' and 'Woman Files Lawsuit Against Gay People...ALL OF THEM' highlight this. The final noticeable aspect to TYT's spread of topics is that it has a higher than average number of media focussed stories with 7% which is almost double the combined network average. It could be argued that these two final aspects may stem from TYT having adopted slightly different news values, or at least places a different level of importance on them, than the other organisations analysed. Using Harcup and O'Neill's (2001) set of news values, one could argue that TYT has weighted the value of 'Entertainment' more heavily than others, due to its content focuses more on stories that deal with the media offer opportunities for humorous treatment. Similarly it could be argued that the news value of 'Magnitude' plays a diminished role in the organisations choice of stories to cover given some of the example detailed above that have a limited impact on society.

Table 6.5: Total count and percent of coverage given to each topic by TYT

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Number observed</b>	<b>Percent observed</b>
<b>Advert</b>	2	1.57%
<b>Business</b>	1	0.79%
<b>Crime</b>	19	14.96%
<b>Domestic Politics</b>	50	39.37%
<b>Education</b>	5	3.94%
<b>Entertainment</b>	5	3.94%
<b>Health</b>	3	2.36%
<b>International News</b>	4	3.15%
<b>International Politics</b>	2	1.57%
<b>Media</b>	9	7.09%
<b>Misc</b>	21	16.54%
<b>Tech/Science</b>	3	2.36%
<b>Terrorism</b>	3	2.36%
<b>Weather</b>	0	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	127	100.00%

Overall it appears that individually, the networks do in fact cover a broad range of topics. Whilst each of the networks do focus more on some topics than others, these differences appear limited to a single topic such as more international news for AJE, more miscellaneous stories for TYT or more domestic politics for Fox. Hence when considering the total output across all five of the network's YouTube channels one can conclude that they do cover a broad range of topics and contribute positively towards the public sphere, at least on the narrow terms of publishing content about matters of general interest (Habermas, 1964: 49).

### **6.3: YouTube Channel Viewership**

It is understood that in the world of media, particularly online news media, that one of the key indicators of success is the number of people who are watching, reading or listening to your content as this speaks towards the role that journalism plays within a democratic society which was discussed in previous chapters. When it comes to video content it can be argued that the number of views a video receives increases the commercial value of that video as advertisers seek to reach the largest audience and are willing to pay more for their adverts to be placed in or alongside content that attracts the most viewers. For cable news channels in America, viewership has generally increased over the last decade, with a noticeable increase between 2015 and 2016 (Matsa, 2017). This is in part why these channels have seen increased revenue during the same time as they, like many other cable channels, have been able to charge advertisers more to be able to advertise alongside their content (Steinberg, 2017). Similarly on YouTube the more views a video receives the more money the videos owner, and YouTube itself, will receive. It should be noted that a news network like the BBC which is a public service broadcaster may choose to not run adverts on any of their YouTube videos and due to the nature of public service broadcasters, are not concerned with the amount of money that can be generated by each video.

If one uses total viewing numbers as the sole determinant of the commercial success of a YouTube channel, then the data in this study clearly suggests which of the five network is the most successful (Table 6.6).

Table 6.6: Average number of views received per video by network

<b>Network</b>	<b>Mean</b>
TYT	104,790
BBC	24,526
CNN	12,975
Fox News	4,749
AJE	2,226

The Young Turks attains a far larger number of viewers per video on YouTube than any of the other more traditional news networks. Despite having a smaller infrastructure and a smaller budget than the other networks, they are at least in terms of viewing figures, a greater success than the other four networks looked at combined. Whilst none of the networks publicly disclose the amount of money they make via YouTube in terms of advertising, it is reasonable to assume TYT is far more profitable than the others when it comes to YouTube. There are of course two key things to point out here. Firstly, as stated previously, TYT is a news network whose business model is heavily focussed towards YouTube and so they are likely to devote resources towards getting as many views on YouTube as possible. The other networks are likely not as concerned with their YouTube viewing figures as they are with their TV figures, as the latter is where the majority of their advertising revenue will come from. Hence, in terms of devoting resources in each of their networks, their YouTube channel may be a somewhat neglected platform. Evidence for this argument can be found in how these other organisations devote resources to the platform. In the case of CNN, their press releases about their digital platforms make no reference to YouTube or their competitors on the platform like TYT (CNN Press Room, 2019a). Alongside this, CNN does promote its online video content but only for its native website for other social media platforms like Facebook (CNN Press Room, 2019b). Similarly, Fox News and BBC News have shown that their focus for online video is more geared towards their own native platforms rather than YouTube (Smith, 2020; BBC Online, 2015). Al Jazeera English does acknowledge the role that YouTube plays, however it does so through comparison with other online video sharing platforms (Maccise & Marai, 2018). So despite the evidence that in general news organisations are investing resources in digital video content (Kalogeropoulos, Cherubini & Newman, 2016: 5) this effort appears to undervalue YouTube.

As discussed in chapter 3, the manner in which the public consumes the news is changing and this is one of the reasons why it is important for news networks to pay attention to the number of views they receive. Research shows that more people, currently around 38%, are getting their news online and that this trend is especially true

for younger people (Matsa & Lu, 2016). This, combined with other trends like greater access to broadband internet and use of smartphones mentioned in previous chapters means that news networks wishing to gain the maximum number of views on their video content may need to shift their priority away from TV production and towards online video production. As Table 6.6 above shows, the YouTube channels of TV networks lag far behind in terms of views compared to the online video focussed TYT. However, going forward the average number of views all of the networks will receive is likely to increase as YouTube has seen a 10-fold increase in total number of views since 2012 (Nicas, 2017) whereas the total amount of TV being watched in America has been declining for a number of years (Soloman, 2017).

Other notable areas where there are distinctions between each of the networks is in terms of the frequency in which they uploaded videos to their channel and the length of their videos. The reason for considering this aspect is that the notion of consistency in regards to the regular update of content on a YouTube channel is likely to contribute towards the overall success of a channel (Welbourne & Grant, 2015: 715). Also, the reason why the notion of video length is important in relation to this thesis is that it speaks towards the notion of user engagement in that the length of a video may have some impact on the number of views it receives. This idea stems from research that suggests longer written articles not only have audiences spend more time engaged with them than shorter articles but also that they have an equal amount of interactions (Mitchell et al. 2016). The research from Mitchell found that audiences spent almost twice as much time with long-form articles and that they get the same amount of visitors than shorter news articles. If this concept is true across all forms of news content, then one would expect the longer videos in the dataset to have at least relatively similar levels of engagement if other variables stay the same.

Each network did not seem to have any discernible pattern in the number of videos they uploaded per day. As can be seen in Table 6.7, some days would see a greater number of videos uploaded across all networks when compared to others. Out of each of the five networks, TYT seemed to be the most consistent in the number of videos that they

uploaded per day with an average of 9. Whilst CNN did upload the most with an average of 37 a day, the number of uploads per day ranged from 20 to 52. Whilst one would not expect an equal number of videos uploaded per day due to the varying nature of each day's news and breaking stories, one might expect some level of consistency. One of the potential reasons why TYT was the most consistent in the number of videos it uploaded is that their business model is based on YouTube content and is hence financially reliant on the platform, whereas for networks like CNN, their main platform for video content is on TV. For TYT to upload an inconsistent number of videos each day would arguably be similar to CNN broadcasting an inconsistent number of hours of TV.

Table 6.7: Number of videos uploaded by each network every day during data collection

Date		AJE	BBC	CNN	Fox News	TYT	Total
01.05.15	Count	9	11	48	10	7	85
02.05.15	Count	14	3	22	1	7	47
03.05.15	Count	17	2	20	2	7	48
04.05.15	Count	23	3	40	8	10	84
05.05.15	Count	17	6	46	7	10	86
06.05.15	Count	10	10	45	15	9	89
07.05.15	Count	11	7	52	18	9	97
08.11.15	Count	18	1	21	12	0	52
09.11.15	Count	16	2	49	47	10	124
10.11.15	Count	13	0	29	56	17	115
11.11.15	Count	23	0	41	19	8	91
12.11.15	Count	29	0	52	0	10	91
13.11.15	Count	11	0	46	101	8	166
14.11.15	Count	16	0	20	13	15	64
<b>Total</b>	Count	227	45	531	309	127	1239

One aspect of the data that is worth pointing out is which specific days there was a drop in the number of videos being uploaded. When looking at both CNN and Fox which



uploaded the greatest number of videos in total, one can see that on the 2nd and 3rd of May and the 8th and 14th of November, each of which being weekends, there was a noticeable drop in videos uploaded. For example, CNN's average was 37 videos a day and yet on weekends it was only uploading around 21 videos. There are obvious irregularities in Table 6.7 such as Fox uploading no videos on November 12th, yet 101 videos the very next day. Similarly, the BBC did not upload any video between the 10th and 14th of November. These do distort the numbers somewhat, but given a larger data sample, one imagines that the trends hinted at in Table 6.7 would likely hold true.

When looking at the variable of video length on its own, the average length of a video was 4 minutes and 26 seconds, however a number of videos, particularly ones by AJE heavily impacted the average length of the videos as they had uploaded entire show broadcasts meaning that some of their videos ranged from 30 minutes in length up to almost 50 minutes. An example of this would be 'Head to Head - Nigeria's future: Failed state or African superpower?'. This video is the entire broadcast of a weekly show hosted on AJE minus the advert breaks that would be present in the TV broadcast version of it. AJE was the only network to consistently upload entire program broadcasts onto its YouTube channel. Fox also had 2 videos that were a full hour in length. These were 'Fox News Digital Special: Analysis of the first GOP debate' and 'Fox News Digital Special: Analysis FBN's prime-time debate'. As can be seen in their titles, these are both digital specials which meant that they were produced, solely for online consumption and were not broadcast on TV. The point that is noteworthy here is that amongst the hundreds of videos Fox uploaded during the data collection period it was only these two that Fox was willing to produce longform content specifically for their online audience on YouTube. The ramifications of this data for the public sphere can be derived through consideration of Machill, Köhler & Waldhauser's 2007 study which found that "retention and comprehension can be improved by employing a narrative device to present TV news." (2007: 185). Based on this, it can be argued that the public sphere is benefitted more by these longer YouTube videos as their length affords the ability for narrative structures to be developed more easily than they could be in a short 4 minute video. Due to the fact that AJE and TYT had average video lengths of almost 7

minutes and 6 minutes respectively, compared to the BBC and CNN's average length being closer to 3 minutes (Table 6.9), it could be argued that at least on this one issue, AJE and TYT are more able to positively contribute towards the public sphere as their length of videos allows for better narrative structures to be developed, thus improving the public's retention of knowledge.

In regards to the relationship between the length of a video and the metrics of user engagement that were recorded in this study, an initial thought one may have had is that the longer a video is, the more content there is for a viewer to like or dislike and hence engage with. However, when one looks at the levels of user engagement compared to the length of video (Chart 6.1, 6.2), the data seems to indicate that there is no benefit in terms of generating more user engagement once a video is over 12 minutes in length.

Chart 6.1: The length of each video compared with the number of views it received

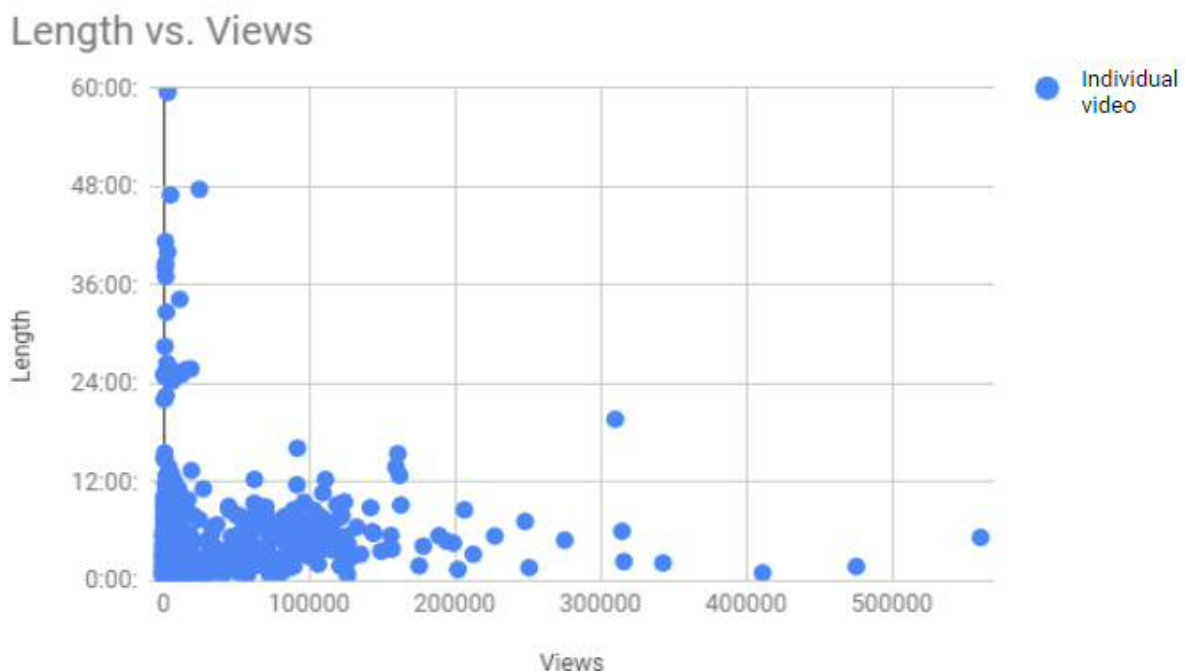
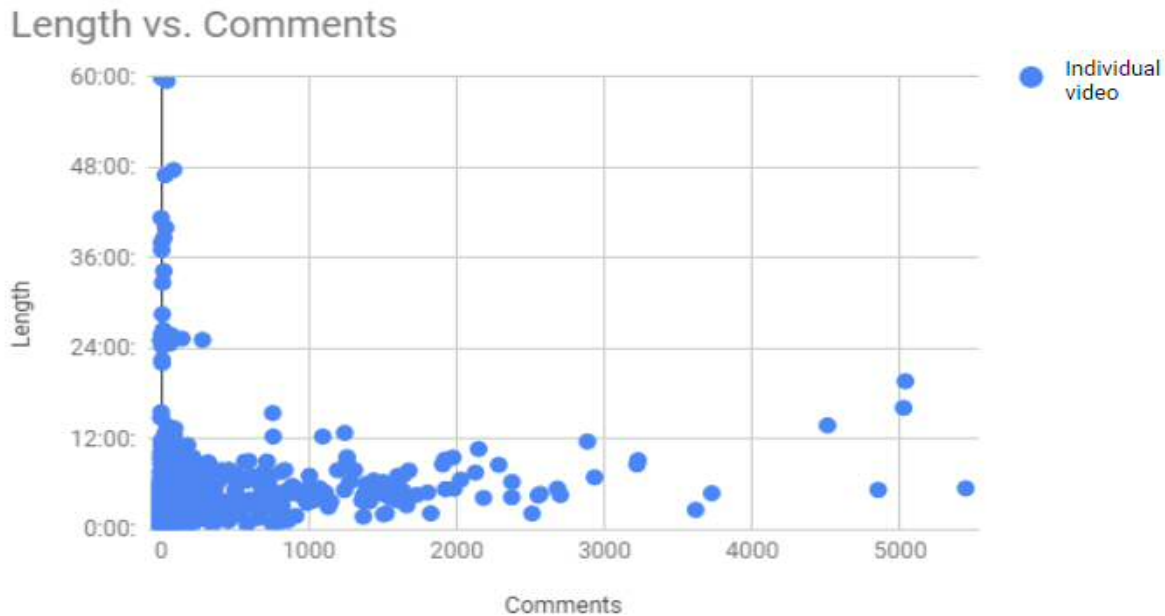


Chart 6.2: The length of each video compared with the number of comments it received



Also, one may think that people would prefer to watch entire shows online rather than just clipped out segments of TV shows. The data gathered indicates that this is not the case. With the two Fox videos cited above, both received fewer than 3000 views which is below the average number of views for a Fox video and relatively low number of engagements in the other metrics as well. If these two videos are compared to another Fox video such as 'O'Reilly's take on the GOP debate' which is only 1 minute in length yet has received over 5000 views and more engagements than either of the hour long Fox videos, it suggests that the length of a video has little to no bearing on the success of a video when it comes to audience engagement.

Academics in the past have suggested that the preferred length of a YouTube video is around 40 seconds in length (Thurman & Lupton, 2008) as this aids its shareability and arguably, its digestibility to the audience. Though not a like for like comparison, Pew Research indicates that the public engages for longer with long-form written articles than they do with short-form articles (Matsa & Lu, 2017). When it comes to engagement with videos, one can look at extreme examples that seem to indicate that the length is

not all that important. For instance, a video uploaded by TYT in 2014 entitled ‘*Sam Harris and Cenk Uygur Clear the Air on Religious Violence and Islam*’ is over 3 hours in length and yet has gained over 2.4 million views. For this many people to watch such a long video suggests that they are not put off by the length, but are rather drawn in by the topic or substance of the video. Looking at further examples from this study’s own data, two videos by CNN ‘New video of Swat team storming The Bataclan’ and ‘Bush begins ‘Jeb Can Fix It’ tour’ both of which are around 50 seconds in length, each have vastly different engagement figures. The first video which deals with the topic of terrorism has 411323 views, whereas the second video which deals with the topic of domestic politics only has 1270 views. Even when one compares videos which share the same topic and relative video length such as ‘Bernie Sanders: I’m not a fan of regime changes’ which also deals with domestic politics and received 14106 views, it is clear that engagement with news content, at least when it comes to the passive engagement of just simply viewing a video is not impacted in any way in which there is a noticeable pattern or trend and certainly not the case for individual networks.

One aspect that does distinguish each of the networks apart is the prominence in which they give their hosts when titling a video. Whereas the BBC, AJE and TYT make no reference to any of their hosts within the titles of their videos, both CNN and Fox do (Table 6.8)

Table 6.8: Number of videos uploaded by each network that make reference to their host

<b>Network</b>	<b>Videos referencing the show’s host</b>	<b>Total number of videos</b>	<b>Percent of videos referencing the show’s host</b>
<b>AJE</b>	0	227	0.00%
<b>BBC</b>	0	45	0.00%
<b>CNN</b>	3	531	0.56%
<b>Fox News</b>	48	309	15.53%
<b>TYT</b>	0	127	0.00%

It should be noted that in CNN's case, this happens only 3 times out of the 531 of their videos analysed and 2 of these cases were adverts for an entertainment program being hosted by Anthony Bourdain whereas the other 'Dr. Gupta: Should all high school athletes get EKG test?' is a produced segment with CNN's chief medical correspondent. In Fox's case, there are 48 of their 309 videos that mention the host of the show. Common examples include 'Gretchen's take: Will Obama get real about terror threat?' and 'Gutfeld: GOP infighting puts Clinton closer to White House' both of which are monologues by the hosts, giving their opinion on recent news events. As was discussed at the start of this chapter, Fox News has a pro conservative bias when it comes to reporting the news and will advocate for conservative positions on many issues as this appeals to the particular demographic of people that they want to watch their network. The fact that a large proportion of their YouTube content is in effect sold to any potential audience, through the means of the video's title, as a video that will contain the opinions of someone on the topic contained in the rest of the video's title is something worthy of note. The use of the journalists name in trying to get an audience's attention can be seen as an example of McGregor's proposed news value of 'celebrification of the journalist" (2002). If one agrees with the premise of the value, it would seem that the data in this study suggests that at least in the case of Fox News, this value has risen in significance within the organisation.

This manner of titling videos brings up the notion of network identity or brand, as in what do networks wish to be known for. If each network's YouTube channel is looked at in a vacuum, that is to say ignoring their other media platforms, one can outline a basic profile for each.

#### **6.4: Branding**

The idea of a news channel having a unique brand is not a new concept. News organisations have, for the most part, tried to brand themselves according to traditional news values such as those laid out by Kovatch and Rosenstiel (2001). By trying to build a brand around the notions of objectivity, fairness etc, news organisations believed that

this would encourage the public to consume their content. However growth in the industry, particularly through technological advancements, led to a greater choice in news organisations. The subsequent increase in competition has arguably forced news organisations to cultivate and tune their brand beyond traditional news values. Jeffery Jones (2012) makes the argument in favour of the idea that “cable news channels are now politics channels – or, better yet, they are cable television networks that, at this moment, use politics as the central identifying mark of their brand.” (2012: 148). He goes on to argue that cable news networks are no longer news operations, but are entertainment operations and hence brand themselves as such. As has been discussed in previous chapters, the news industry is heavily driven by economic factors and for visual mediums like TV or online video, a key element of this is viewing figures/ratings. Having a strong brand image is now more important than ever when it comes to having the best TV ratings (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2007). It is not only academics that have realised the importance of branding in the news industry, but also by those in charge of news organisations. The current president of CNN has said that “in television, and in particular cable television, brand is everything.” (Jeff Zucker, in Sherman, 2010). Similarly, the president of MSNBC has accepted this new news environment and realised that “Fox figured it out that you have to stand for something in cable” (Phil Griffin, in Sherman, 2010). Both these quotes highlight how commercial TV broadcasters realise that to succeed in the currently competitive environment they must, through branding, distinguish themselves from each other. Whilst there is competition in TV markets, there is arguably greater competition online due to a far greater choice in content. This would suggest that when it comes to news organisations, branding is an even more important concept. As the CEO of TYT puts it, “there is an ocean of content and no one will watch your brand-sanitized vanilla anymore because they have unlimited options.” (Uygur, 2016). The reason why this notion of branding is important is that, as outlined above, it speaks towards the further commercialisation of the news industry which as discussed in chapter 1, contributes towards the eroding of the public sphere.

If the identity or brand of a news organisation is key to its success then considering the data discussed in the previous chapter, one is able to identify some key characteristics that arguably form part of each network's YouTube channel brand. It is important to consider these characteristics of the network's YouTube channels as not only does it generate part of the answer to a key underlying question in this thesis, that being how do traditional news organisations and new news organisations differ on YouTube, it also helps this field of study in general by providing material towards the ongoing debate as to whether like for like comparisons can be drawn between traditional and new media platforms.

There are several characteristics that are discernible from Fox News' YouTube channel. As has already been stated, there is an emphasis on using their on air talents names in their video titles. In nearly all cases this is done to highlight to the potential viewer that the video will contain the opinions of that host on whatever topic is described in the rest of the video's title. A related characteristic, is that nearly 1 in 5 of their videos contains a "?" which indicates that the video is either asking the audience to consider a question or that the video itself, perhaps the host named in the video's title, will be directly answering it themselves. A third characteristic is their heavy focus on domestic politics stories, with 168 of their 309 videos focussing on that topic. Similarly, there is very little focus on international news or politics. A final characteristic of its YouTube channel is that in relation to other channels, their videos receive a relatively low number of views per video, with an average of 4749 (Table 6.6). In all, Fox News' YouTube channel's identity could be surmised as a channel that delivers opinion driven news predominately about the current events going on within the American political system.

CNN's YouTube channel has a number of characteristics that are different to those of Fox News'. The first characteristic is CNN uploads a large amount of content to the channel. As can be seen in Table 2, CNN uploads almost twice as many videos on any given day than the next closest network which is Fox. They upload nearly 3 or 4 times as many videos per day than the other networks. A second characteristic is the channel's focus on crime and domestic politics. Another characteristic is that whilst the

majority of their videos receive under 10,000 views, their average was 12,975. This was in part due to a small number of their videos, 11, reaching over 100,000 views. A final characteristic is that almost half of their videos are in a produced segment format. In all CNN's YouTube channel has the identity of one which has a large amount of resources due to the volume of content being produced as well as being a channel that focuses on topics that most traditional TV news channels do, as according to Henderson (2014) and Jurkowitz et al (2013). Finally, CNN does not appear to push a particular point of view, and merely serves as a platform from which the details of an event or the views of an expert/relevant party are given, as indicated in their video titles.

Whilst there is a relatively small sample size for the BBC it is still possible to identify some characteristics of the network's YouTube channel. Firstly, its content is equally focussed on both domestic and international events. Secondly, only a small number of their videos, 3, gain over 100,000 views and hence can be said to perform well in comparison to the rest of their videos. A third characteristic is that videos on the BBC's YouTube channel are on average 2 minutes and 39 seconds in length and this is the shortest out of all of the other networks (Table 6.9). Looking at the YouTube channel in a vacuum, one would not suspect the vast resources that the BBC has at its disposal.

Table 6.9: Average length of video uploaded by each network

<b>Network</b>	<b>Average length of video (m:s)</b>
<b>AJE</b>	6:41
<b>BBC</b>	2:39
<b>CNN</b>	2:47
<b>Fox News</b>	5:21
<b>TYT</b>	5:55

Al Jazeera English's YouTube channel has a number of distinct characteristics that the other networks do not have. First is its focus on international news and politics which makes up 56% of its content. The second is the average length of their videos which is



6 minutes 41 seconds (Table 6.9). This is the longest out of all the networks and is largely caused by AJE’s willingness to upload entire TV show broadcasts onto the YouTube channel. In total 34 of their videos were over 20 minutes in length. These two characteristics alone enable AJE to arguably have a clear identity and brand which is providing in-depth international news coverage to a Western audience.

As The Young Turks are based on YouTube as their main platform, it is difficult to look at their YouTube channel’s identity in a vacuum as it is their identity. One of its noticeable characteristics is that its primary topic of focus is domestic politics. Secondly, 60% of its videos use a roundtable format when delivering and discussing the news. Thirdly, as noted in the previous chapter, TYT has the most negatively sentimented titles for their YouTube content. Finally, a key characteristic is the success of TYT’s content in relation to the other networks when considering the metrics of engagement. As can be seen in Table 6.10, TYT content generates drastically more engagement than any of the other networks.

Table 6.10: Average number of comments, likes, dislikes and views per video by each network

	<b>Comments</b>	<b>Likes</b>	<b>Dislikes</b>	<b>Views</b>
<b>AJE</b>	14	16	5	2,226
<b>BBC</b>	45	99	11	24,526
<b>CNN</b>	83	59	34	12,975
<b>Fox News</b>	37	28	14	4,749
<b>TYT</b>	1,374	1,973	360	104,790

With all these characteristics, one could describe TYT’s YouTube identity as a channel that successfully engages with its audience by using open discussion formats to present politically focussed news with a greater than average emotional tone. These statistics provide evidence towards the claim that within the platform of YouTube, TYT is the greatest contributor towards the public sphere.

Whilst these profiles are basic in nature, they provide a good foundation from which to compare not only the news organisations' content on other platforms but also to compare individual videos on their YouTube channels against this profile. It is arguably very important for news organisations to have strong and identical branding across all of its platforms as research by Kalogeropoulos & Newman (2017) has shown that through the use of strong branding, people are more likely to correctly attribute content to the original makers of that content when it is being accessed via other platforms such as on Facebook or YouTube. Kalogeropoulos & Newman's study highlights the importance of branding in today's media landscape as due to more and more news being distributed and consumed on social media platforms, correct attribution to the content originator is essential in driving web traffic and ergo increasing revenue through advertising or subscriptions.

It could be argued that networks like TYT, Fox News and CNN see greater correct brand attribution as they focus more on domestic politics, which is the topic that sees the highest rate of correct attribution (Kalogeropoulos & Newman, 2017). This would then justify their focus on political topics as not only then does it help brand attribution but as was shown in the previous chapter, domestic politics also performs well in terms of measures of user engagement.

## **6.5: Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to highlight the key characteristics of the news network's YouTube channels. Whilst there is existing research regarding the characteristics of the network's TV channels (see Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Groeling, 2008; Baum, 2003), there is little work done towards mapping the characteristics of YouTube news channels. One explanation for this is that one would expect the characteristics of CNN's TV channel to exactly mirror those of its YouTube channel owing to the hybridization of our media system and the cross pollination that comes with it.

Whilst this largely might be the case as seen in the discussion earlier in this chapter, describing these characteristics in relation to the platform of YouTube leads to more nuanced discussion such as looking at user engagement or how segments are titled. Another reason why it's important to attempt to highlight the individual characteristics of these YouTube channels is that due to changes in how people consume the news, there is now greater reason to look at the growing mediums of news consumption. A final reason that is connected to the previous point, is that whilst many studies considering traditional news platforms have tended to look at large corporate entities, whether this be TV channels or national newspapers, studies that focus on online news have to consider smaller news operations whether these are run by an individual or a small group of people. This therefore means that highlighting the differing characteristics between YouTube channels like CNN and channels like TYT is important as it draws attention to the potential explanations as to why smaller operations on YouTube appear to be far more successful than their structurally larger competitors.

In conclusion, the issues that the data raises in this chapter reinforces many of the established notions in communications research. Firstly, they are reinforced in that the topics that are predominantly covered by traditional news organisations are also dominant in their coverage in YouTube videos. Even though a majority of the content analysed was cross pollinated from TV, the fact that YouTube only networks like TYT follow many of the same trends as more traditional news organisations this indicates that these networks share a number of common news values and hence, what sort of news stories should be covered. This reinforcement is an important one as it also speaks to the notion of homogenisation in the media that both Groshek (2008) and Boczkowski (2010) allude to.

One area of existing research that is challenged by the data in this chapter is that strong brand identity will lead success. Whilst a clear case can be made that the strong brand identity that the Fox News network has, has helped it be successful in the platform of television, the same cannot be said for the platform of YouTube in which it performed poorly in terms of user engagement variables. However, the idea that brand identity is

maybe not as important on YouTube as it is on other news platforms is somewhat dampened by the success of TYT which openly says that “we’re progressive when almost no one else [is]” (Uygur in Yu, 2016). The fact that TYT is notably more successful on YouTube than its competitors whilst maintaining a strong brand identity, indicates that having a strong news brand, whilst being important for TV ratings, (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2007) is not the driving factor behind the success of news videos in YouTube.

## **CHAPTER 7: YouTube comment sections**

### **7.1: Introduction**

Whereas the previous two chapters have dealt with the overall picture of news videos on YouTube and the individual networks looked at in this study, this chapter will focus on individual videos within the data sample. The aim will be to explore and discuss in a closer manner how various aspects of each video, in particular the user engagement on each video, raise certain ideas that have been considered in other studies broadly within this field. By considering these aspects, one should also be able to adequately discuss RQ3: “Do user comments reflect Habermas’ notion of the public sphere?”.

This will largely take the form of discussing the sentiment and form of comments written on each video. This will take the form of 5 case studies. These discussions should serve to highlight that as a platform for news, YouTube should be considered just as a legitimate news platform as other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook where much academic work is currently focussed. The implications that should result from these discussions are that YouTube as a platform from which journalism can be delivered, is a valid platform which past studies in journalism that have been conducted on other platforms, can also be applied and investigated on YouTube as well. Rather than being a platform that is considered distinct enough from others to warrant different approaches or considerations to areas of research, it should in fact be seen as extremely comparable and hence, a platform that contributes towards the public sphere. As it has already been argued by some scholars that online social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter provide a positive contribution towards democratic engagement (Dennis, 2016: 267), then a case could also be made for YouTube.

As has been detailed in earlier chapters both in the discussion of literature regarding the use of comments on news platforms as well as their significance in relation to other metrics recorded in this study, user comments clearly serve as a key indicator of user engagement. However thus far in this study, comments have been viewed from a

statistical perspective. In order to adequately answer RQ3, it is necessary to review the types of comments that are being written by the audience. The reasoning for this stems from Habermas' idealised notion of the public sphere which required rational discussion in order to lead to sensible decision making.(Chouliaraki, 2013). Given the existing literature discussed in chapter 3, there may be a concern that online comments actually do little for the public sphere due to their widely perceived nature of being toxic (Braithwaite, 2013; Massanari, 2015; Salter, 2017).

## **7.2: Choice of case studies**

From what was discussed in chapter 3 regarding the existing literature on user comments, a case can be made that it is important to look at what comments are being written on news videos on YouTube in a qualitative manner. Previous chapters have considered comments at a macro, quantitative level and from the business side of news, this would be of interest. However, for the individual journalists, as outlined earlier, user comments can and do have an impact on future content they produce (Santana, 2011). With this in mind, one can now turn to look at specific cases of user comments on YouTube videos within this paper's data sample and consider the comments being made as to whether they can be interpreted as improving the audience-journalist relationship and providing the reasoned discussion needed for a well formed public sphere.

Five case studies were chosen from the data set as each of them contained comments that clearly highlighted distinct aspects of online user comments that have been found in research on other platforms. These five aspects are capitalisation, the use of hashtags, the use of humour/anger, the target of the comments and the depth of discussion. As acknowledged in this study's methodology, even though case studies are limited to descriptive or exploratory objectives (Yin, 2013), for the purposes of answering RQ3, this can be seen as a suitable approach as the cases chosen help facilitate broader discussions around whether any argument can be made that user comments do in fact reflect Habermas' notion of the public sphere.

### 7.3.1: Case 1

The first case looked at was the most viewed video in the data sample, ID1217, 'BREAKING: Terrorists Attack Paris, Hostage Situation Unfolding'. This video was posted by TYT as the terrorist attack in Paris was unfolding. It is a 4-person panel discussion upon the limited information that was being reported elsewhere about the attack as well as discussion about what should be done going forward in regards to policy. As well as being the most viewed video it also had 4852 comments at the time the data was collected.

The top comment on the video was "TOO MUCH CONTROVERSY TO SAY SOMETHING FUNNY". This generated 68 replies by other users and was liked 187 times. There are a number of ways to interpret this comment. The most notable aspect of the comment is that it is written entirely in capital letters. There are multiple possible interpretations of a comment when it has been written all in capitals, also known as 'all caps'. Regardless of the writer's intention any statement written in all caps can be perceived as angry (Rösner & Krämer, 2016), rude, (Huxley in Guarino, 2017) or as if being shouted (NOAA, 2016). Use of all caps has become synonymous online with shouting and as with real life shouting it is to gain attention. The fact that this comment employs this technique and is also the top ranked comment with a considerable number of replies to it should not be of surprise. In terms of interpreting the comment in regards to its actual content, the user appears to be criticizing either the terrorist attacks themselves or TYT's discussion about the policy implications of the attack in that the attacks are too sensitive a topic for there to be any humour involved, which as discussed in the previous chapter, is an aspect of TYT's brand when discussing the news.

Criticism of the hosts and network continue in the other top-rated comments. These are "Cenk as usual will twist the story to America's faults. Holy shit this man is an asshole",

“MUSLIM TERRORIST ATTACK PARIS. Should be the title.” and “sigh, i'm actually sick of TYT now, they have tired me with their quasi enlightened logic.”. All three of these commenters are critiquing the network in some way and all three generated multiple replies by other users. Whilst it is debatable the extent to which these comments are constructive in their criticism, it is within reason to suggest that it is these type of comments that create the environment alluded to in Santana's (2011) study in which very few journalists strongly agreed that user comments promoted thoughtful discussion. It can be argued that part of the reason user comments are often seen as unhelpful is their toxicity in nature. As discussed in the literature review, it is hard to define what constitutes a toxic comment as it is often open to interpretation however, comments like “The world needs another world war to clean the shit out” certainly could be deemed as toxic due to its violent and vitriolic language. It has been thought that online anonymity encourages people to be more aggressive in their interactions (Siegel et al, 1986) however, more recent work by Rösner & Krämer (2016) has found anonymity has no direct effect on the aggressiveness of comments that users write. What was a greater contributor to the aggressiveness of user comments was when the group norm was aggressive, which is to say that the environment in which users were asked to comment, already contained aggressive comments. Rösner & Krämer's work is important to consider when looking at YouTube comments as it would suggest that part of the reason more recently written comments on the video such as “SCenk is a radical islam sympathizer.” and “People that watch TYT cannot wait anything else then LIES and/or BULLSHIT!” exist, is because of the vitriolic comments written previously. The idea of comment sections having a snowball effect wherein a handful of initial vitriolic comments lays the foundation for more vitriolic comments to be written (Sood, Churchill and Antin, 2012) is something for news organisations to consider when it comes to the moderation of comment sections.

To further support the idea that there is a lack of thoughtful discussion by users in comment sections, one can consider the length of the comments being made. Many of the comments on this video are a single sentence in length and sometimes just a handful of words. Comments such as “religion of peace at work” or “Stop blaming



America Cenk.” highlight the bluntness of users. The brevity in the user comments appears to be in contrast to the content of the video itself which is an open discussion about what the reaction should be to the events unfolding in Paris. This dichotomy is noteworthy because as mentioned previously, the dialogic nature of the video is a contributing factor to the amount of user interaction (Weber, 2013), however it does not mean that the comments will mirror or reflect the dialogical or constructive tone of the video. Taking this single factor on its own, one could potentially argue that the content and tone of a video plays a lesser role in influencing the type of comments that are written by users on it compared to the role of the tone of existing comments on the video.

In all, this video highlights several aspects of user engagement, particularly the use of vitriolic of comments and the overuse of capitalisation both of which demonstrates that research by Weber (2013), Rösner & Krämer (2016) and Santana (2011) appears to be relevant to the medium of YouTube videos as well.

### **7.3.2: Case 2**

The second case looked at was ID1027, ‘Rep. Peter King: Paris attack should be wake-up call for US’, which was uploaded by Fox News. Much like the video looked at in the case above, this is also focussed on the events surrounding the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Paris. The format of the video is a one to one discussion with a Republican representative who is named in the title of the video. This was Fox News’ most viewed and most commented upon video in the data sample.

Much like with case 1, a number of the top ranked comments on the video contain criticism of the network itself, with users writing things such as “not one mention of the syrian illegals” and “I was waiting for someone to blame it on Obama”. However, the top ranked comment on the video was “Don't allow this horrific act allow you to be drawn into the loss of your humanity or tolerance. That is the intended outcome. #PrayForParis”. The fact that this is the top ranked comment by YouTube’s algorithm is

noteworthy for several factors. The first is that unlike in case 1, this comment is not toxic in nature at all. In fact this comment is actively asking other commenters and viewers not to be drawn into toxic thinking. Whether or not this call was heeded by other commenters is hard to tell, however there are very few comments on the video that use all caps which as discussed above tends to be a contributing factor to the perceived vitriolic nature of comments. A second noteworthy factor is the use of the hashtag “#PrayForParis”. Whilst hashtags are commonly associated with the social media platform of Twitter, the fact that this commenter included it in their comment highlights the idea of overlapping social media trends/narratives. Although some research suggests that it is still difficult to fully conceptualize and measure social media content across multiple platforms (Zelenkauskaite, 2016 and Driscoll & Thorson, 2015), this instance can be seen as serving two purposes. The first is to attempt to utilize the hashtag on Twitter which was used to aggregate all the positive tweets about the attack, in a similar manner on YouTube and secondly the hashtag itself serves as a search function where when clicked on, directs users to other content on YouTube using that hashtag. The use of hashtags as a method of organizing audiences on a social media platform is not a new concept (see Kaun & Uldam, 2017) however much of the academic work on this issue focuses on the platform of Twitter. Examples of this include Barnard’s study on hashtags used during the Ferguson riots (Barnard, 2017) and Ellcessor’s study looking at celebrity activism on Twitter (Ellcessor, 2016).

One final thing to consider when looking at this video and the comments written on it, is the fact that this is a Fox News video and hence the demographics should be a factor to bear in mind for the video. Research shows that older people are less likely to use YouTube in any capacity, let alone news, than younger people (Blattberg, 2015). This combined with the fact discussed in previous chapters that the average age of a Fox News TV viewer is 68 years old can lead one to conclude that the majority of users commenting on this Fox News YouTube video are less likely to be a regular Fox News viewer. Further to this, young people tend to be more liberal in their world views (Zell & Bernstein, 2013). Considering that Fox News tends to have a conservative slant towards its take on the news (Monica, 2009; Barr, 2009; Jones, 2012; Smith. & Searles,

2013) one could suggest that the comments, because they are more likely to be written by younger users due to the demographics of internet users, and hence more liberal users (Pew Research, 2018), are going to be more hostile and critical towards the network and its presentation of the news. Whilst there are still some comments such as “Fucking fox news needs to die out already.” the majority of the comments tend to be focussed on the news event in the video itself rather than the presentation of the video. This lends strength to the idea touched upon in the first analysis chapter that content, particularly when it is more sensational, is a the main driving force behind why comments are made (Tenenboim & Cohen, 2013 and Weber, 2013)

### **7.3.3: Case 3**

The third video looked at in greater depth was ID304, ‘Attack survivor: Cell phone saved me’. This was a relatively short video at 45 seconds long, uploaded by CNN soon after the terrorist attack in Paris. Despite the video being short in length, it still generated a large amount of engagement with 348 comments at the time of data collection.

This is an interesting case for several reasons. The first is the type of comments that were written. Amongst the top rated comments were ones such as “Samsung has paid to cnn for such advertisement lmao”, “bulletproof cell phone????? who makes this??? I need one to beat you in the head if you believe this bullshit” and “FUCKING SAMSUNG MARKETING AGENDA”. All three of these comments suggest a form of criticism towards either CNN itself for running the story or at the member of public involved who claimed his phone stopped a bullet from hitting him in the head. Whilst all being critical in nature there is the potential for an interpretation wherein the use of humour is being used as well. Over exaggeration through use of multiple question marks, all caps and acronyms like “lmao” (laughing my ass off) can be seen as an effective way of communicating a critique of the content. This style of criticizing can be seen in other mediums, most notably in political cartoons (Hietalahti et al, 2016 and Connors, 2005). Due to their over the top nature, one can also see the employment of sarcasm or silliness in these comments. This is important to consider as Taecharungroj &

Nueangjamnong (2015) suggest that both of these styles of communication are the most prevalent forms of humour used on the internet. Their study looked exclusively at content on Facebook and so extrapolating from one platform to the whole of the internet may be too big a stretch, however the comments on this YouTube video at least lend support to their claim in that it appears these two forms of humour are used on other social media platforms as well.

A second reason why this is an interesting case is how it illustrates the work done by Li & Thorson (2015) on newspaper content, in that it may also be applicable to new news platforms such as YouTube. Their study looked at 10 years worth of newspaper content and financial data and concluded that “publishing more news content, particularly in shorter article length and more diverse topic areas, boosts the newspaper’s circulation and ad revenue over time.” (2015: 382). Applying this idea across to YouTube, it would suggest that uploading more videos but of shorter length would benefit news organisations in terms of both potential ad revenue and number of people who will engage with their channel on YouTube.

One final point to be made about this video arises from the fact that the video looked at in this case is particularly short in length and yet has performed successfully in terms of user engagement relative to other videos in the data sample by the same network. Due to this, one could say that despite the suggestion made in chapter 5, looking at the data set as a whole, that it may in fact be in a news network’s best interest to upload shorter length videos rather than entire hour long program broadcasts that some have done.

#### **7.3.4: Case 4**

The fourth video looked at in more detail was ID1049, ‘Greta: Use good judgment with first amendment rights’. This was a monologue delivered by Fox News host Greta Van Susteren about her views on protecting the first amendment of free speech and how sometimes protecting that right can put police officers lives in danger. This story was inspired by the event of an anti-Islam campaigner holding a draw Muhammad contest in

Garland, Texas. Despite receiving a relatively low number of views at 458, it did generate a proportionally large number of engagements in terms of dislikes, 26, and comments which totalled 18.

Some of the top comments on this video such as “FREE SPEECH IS JUST THAT, PERIOD. PROTECT IT FOOL. AS SOON AS YOU PUT CONDITIONS ON IT, YOU LOOSE IT. GET OFF YOUR SOAP BOX” further highlight the earlier discussion around the use of all caps in user comments. However, when this comment is put alongside others such as “She grits her teeth- like a flying dick is going to try to shove itself in” and “GRETA your on my SHIT LIST!!!!!!!!!!” a pattern begins to emerge. Notably many of the comments on this video are directed, in an aggressive manner, towards the news anchor. As was discussed in case 2, there is reason to believe that users on YouTube are unlikely to be traditional Fox News viewers and may disagree with its take on the news, hence the vitriolic language directed at it in their videos. However for this video the vitriol seems especially directed at the anchor. One reason as to why this might be the case is the fact that Greta Van Susteren is specifically named in the title of the video, thereby making her the focal point of the video. It could also be suggested that there is an element of sexism at play which would link back to Massanari’s (2015) study discussed earlier in this chapter.

By making herself the focal point of the video Greta, as well as Fox News, appear to be falling into Fengler & Ruß-Mohl’s (2008) economic theory of journalism which suggests that “journalists’ self-interests affect newsgathering and news processing. Unlike many other professions, journalists may have an exceptional interest in non-material rewards for their work, like attention and influence.” (2008: 675). The desire for public attention whether in the form of seeing their work in print, or in this case on TV/YouTube, can be seen as a “rational choice” (2008, 674) for any journalist as it can be seen as a fringe benefit of the job. However, by making themselves, or more importantly their personal analysis of the news, the main point of the video, this likely focuses the attention of the viewer/commenter on that aspect of the video rather than on the news event itself. It is arguable that the impact of these comments arising from the news anchor being a focus

of the video are minimal in terms of their influence over the anchor's own perception of how they can change their content to better suit their audience. This is because despite there being research suggesting that audience feedback does impact journalist's view of their role (Hanusch & Tandoc, 2017), journalists working for large networks such as Fox News are extremely unlikely to read user comments on a platform that is not the main means of delivery. In this case, it would be TV. An area for further research would be to look at the differences in the sentiment of feedback that news shows or hosts receive between live feedback social media platforms like Twitter and delayed feedback platforms such as YouTube, where the content is uploaded some time after its initial airing.

### **7.3.5: Case 5**

The fifth video looked at in greater depth is ID1168, 'Inside Story - How should France deal with aftermath of Paris attacks?'. This video is the entire program of the weekly show called Inside Story by AJE which looks at what France should do after the terrorist attacks in Paris. Whilst the start of the show contains a produced segment, the vast majority of the show is a round table discussion between the host and three academics.

Whilst a number of the top comments are short, single sentences in a similar manner to those outlined in previously discussed videos, what is notable about this video is that many of the comments are far greater in length and greater in substance. For example, the top comment on the video is:

Instead of spending 25 minutes talking about how different experts fear this attack might impact the muslim community, how about debating the subject of how to freaking stop these maniacs? Even when the interviewer asks how to reach these young men before they become to radicalized, the expert just talks about how muslims feel marginalized. I'm am not denying that it might be the case, but it is not the problem at hand. Loads of people feel marginalized without turning to violence. This is a farce.

This comment shows a high level of engagement between the viewer and the video content as the viewer makes reference to specific questions the host asks of the guests. Despite some research (Newman, 2010; Hassoum, 2012) suggesting that audiences have ever decreasing attention spans and hence are less likely to watch a relatively lengthy YouTube video, the fact that this video whilst being long in length has still generated not only a high total number of comments, but that a noticeable number of these are lengthy as well, is a point to reflect on. One could hypothesize that because of the video's length, there is greater depth to the discussion in the video and hence there is more content for viewers to discuss in their comments. Work by Almgren & Olsson (2015) found that news websites preferred to let user only comment on soft news stories. As discussed in the literature review, soft news stories tend to lack the level of depth and newsworthiness that hard news stories do. Their research also found that users tended to prefer commenting on hard news stories such as politics. Previous chapters have indicated that videos covering hard news topics tend to have more user engagement. What the comments from this particular video suggest is that users when they do engage with hard news videos, the depth of the discussion in the video could have an impact on the depth of the discussion in the user comments.

#### **7.4: Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to present several case studies that were emblematic of the type of comments that news videos received on YouTube. Through discussion of five aspects of user comment namely: capitalisation, the use of hashtags, the use of humour/anger, the target of the comments and the depth of discussion, guided by existing research on these areas a number of conclusions can be drawn as to whether user comments on YouTube videos reflect Habermas' notion of the public sphere.

One could suggest that the simple answer to this question is, yes. The reason for this stems from the literature cited in chapter 1 wherein the minimal functions of journalism (McNair, 2011), by their very nature contribute towards the public sphere. In particular,

the role of contextualising and adding meaning to news events as well as acting as a watchdog over governments and institutions. User comments on YouTube videos can be said to fulfil the function of adding meaning and context to news events because as has been demonstrated in some of the case studies looked at, of the top comments on them reviewed, some of these comments attempt to contextualize the information being presented in the video to other users through a number of means. For instance user comments, through capitalisation and hyperbole, emphasize a particular aspect of the news story being presented in the video. The role of acting as a watchdog can also be said to be fulfilled as is evidence by the criticisms aimed at the news producers. Whilst some of these criticisms are superficial or off topic, some such as the one highlighted in case 5 can be well thought out and constructive. As the media can be deemed an elite institution in and of itself due to its closeness and reliance on other elite institutions (Davis, 2003; Wedel, 2017), any criticism aimed at the media, which in this case are the YouTube channels of news networks, can be argued as attempts to hold them accountable for the content they produce. The fulfilment of these two roles of journalism I believe are enough to say that user comments on YouTube videos do contribute towards the public sphere. However, underlying this argument is the assumption that comments made contributed to rational discussion that would lead to sensible decision making. This is a large assumption to make for two key reasons. The first is that rationality of the comments written is highly open to interpretation. Secondly, without further research it is impossible to know whether the presence of these comments influenced any decision making process either for other users or for the news organisations themselves. From this, it could be said that user comments on YouTube videos do not reflect Habermas' notion of the public sphere. This is because as Kilby (2014: 23) has pointed out, Habermas emphasis on the importance of rationality ignores other forms of participation such as emotive and passionate rhetoric. Therefore, it could be argued that whilst Habermas' notion of a public sphere cannot be found in the user comment on YouTube videos, alternative interpretations of the public sphere concept could be found in such comments. An example of an alternative interpretation is provided by Wahl-Jorgensen (2019) in which she highlights how an 'emotional turn' has occurred in media studies wherein emotions are seen as making "their way into our



mediated discussions, where they have the potential to form the basis for the articulation of collective grievances, toward the aim of political and social change” (Ibid: 2) and that social media in particular has helped facilitate the expanding role that emotions play within the public sphere.

The implications from the discussion in this chapter are twofold. The first is that despite these issues having been looked at on other platforms, it appears that these issues are also relevant for YouTube. This means that going forward, YouTube needs to be considered not only as a platform on which videos can be uploaded, but also as a platform that contains compelling avenues for further research into user engagement with respect to comments. This would go some way to further advancing the arguments and suggestions made about other social networking sites where news content is consumed. Secondly, the discussions held were informed and arranged around research from other platforms. Due to this guiding influence, it is likely that were one to approach these comments, particularly from a wider pool of case studies, from a fresh, undirected perspective, that new aspects of YouTube comments may be revealed. This is important as currently this chapter makes its case on only a small number of comments from across a small sample of videos. The assumptions made about the role that YouTube comments play in the public sphere are just assumptions and that a broader inquiry is required in order to determine if the arguments made hold across a wider sample of both comments and YouTube channels.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

### 8.1: Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis will attempt to situate the findings of this study within the wider debates surrounding the concepts raised throughout this thesis. In doing so, it is hoped to highlight the significance of this study to both academic research as well as the industry itself.

At the core of this study was the concept of the role that YouTube plays within a democratic society. In order to approach this issue, Habermas' concept of the public sphere was utilised in order to help align this study with other research in the field of communication studies that is concerned with the intersection of media systems and the public.

The justification for this study can be found in three main factors with both the theory and practice of journalism. The first factor to consider is what the main purposes of journalism are. As detailed in chapter 1, this can be boiled down to the idea of helping facilitate and enhance the public sphere through informing the public, providing meaning and context to news events, providing space for ideas to be discussed and acting as a watchdog of those in power (McNair, 2011). The second factor that gave justification for this research is the issue of framing as because facts "possess no intrinsic meaning" (Gamson, 1989: 157), it is the role of the journalist or news organisation to provide that meaning which is done through their use of language. Given that the headlines of a news story are viewed as trying to both attract attention and summarise the subsequent content (Andrew, 2007), the study of how the titles of YouTube videos frame stories through their use of emotive language is important to consider.

Thirdly, due to changes in technology, political economic factors have driven traditional newsrooms towards more digital spaces and practices (Bunce, 2017; Aviles & Leon, 2002). This has also happened in part due to the increasing number of people who are

seeking their news from online platforms (Caumont, 2013). These changes detailed in chapter 3, demonstrate that as more and more people seek news online and are capable of watching video content online, that YouTube is a critical platform to study with regards to its relation with journalism. A final factor is that the growth of digital news is linked to the ability for the public to engage with the news more directly and play a role in the news making process (Allan & Thorsen, 2009). By demonstrating how audiences engage with news content on YouTube one could show that YouTube as a platform serves a similar civic duty of enhancing the public sphere as other traditional forms of news media.

By documenting past scholarly research in the areas regarding debates on the nature of the public sphere, the role of journalism in society, how emotional language has been used by journalists and how there have been shifts in news consumption habits, this thesis has attempted to highlight both the relevance and importance of YouTube within the field of journalism studies through its relation to the public sphere. In order to investigate the role that YouTube plays within a democratic society, three research questions were devised:

RQ1: What type of news content is being uploaded to YouTube and how does its topic and format relate to types of user engagement with the videos?

RQ2: What role does the use of emotion in YouTube video titles play in the levels of user engagement?

RQ3: Do user comments reflect Habermas' notion of the public sphere?

In order to answer these questions, a mixed methodological approach was taken where both a content analysis and sentiment analysis was conducted across a total of 1239 videos sampled from five news channels on YouTube over two 7 day periods.

This concluding chapter will present the findings that relate to each of these questions and discuss the wider implications of the results and what significance they hold in the field of communication studies.

## **8.2: Answers to the research questions**

In answer to RQ1 the data from the study showed that there was a relative degree of similarity of topics of news reported on across each of the channels analysed. Apart from a few exceptions, the networks combined devoted almost 45% of their content towards the topics of crime and domestic politics (Table 5.3). The distribution of topics appeared to support existing research looking at the range of topics covered by the news media (Jurkowitz et al, 2013; Henderson, 2014; Brown & Roemer, 2016). In terms of the use of different formats of presenting the news, the channels did not exhibit a clear preference for any one of the types of format recorded although produced segments were utilised slightly more than the others (Table 5.2. Given Soffer's contention that journalism is a dialogic act (2009), it was mildly surprising that the round table discussion format was relatively infrequently.

As to how the topic and format of a news video on YouTube relates to the levels of user engagement with it, there is a clear case to be made that there is some link between the two. Given that videos covering the topic of terrorism received on average 70,604 views and that the topic of business only received 5,208 views on average (Table 5.4) shows that the topic of a news video plays a role in the number of people who will watch a video. This data appears to reinforce existing research such as that by Uribe & Gunter (2007) that sensational news stories garner more attention from the public than less sensational stories. This idea is further supported by the fact that miscellaneous stories analysed, which often dealt with topics of religion or bizarre events had the second highest average number of views (Table 5.4) and the second highest amongst the other measures of user engagement (Table 5.5). Given that these videos have performed well, it lends support to research conducted by Tenenboim & Cohen (2013) in which the more sensational content tended to be engaged with more. One datapoint that does

challenge the idea that there is a link between topic and user engagement is the average number of likes received for videos covering terrorism. The topics of media, education, domestic politics, crime and miscellaneous all received a higher number of likes on average. The fact that terrorism videos are not 'liked' as much by the audience suggests that the relationship between the news content being presented and the act of clicking a 'like' button is more complex than a simple expression of approval. A further challenge to existing research that the data presents involves the fact that the topic of crime whilst being the second most covered topic, only received the 6th highest average number of views (Table 5.5). This presents a challenge to existing conceptions as despite researchers like Franklin (2003) arguing that there has been an increase in "McJournalism" which focuses on sensational topics like crime due to their attention grabbing nature, the data in this thesis suggests that crime is in fact not as attention grabbing, at least when it comes to news content on YouTube. This data point speaks to the idea that there is a fundamental difference in regards to what is popular on YouTube in regards to news. As mentioned in this thesis, a majority of the content uploaded to YouTube by traditional news networks is taken from their TV broadcasts. This then leads one to consider the idea that certain topics such as crime, whilst being popular on traditional news platforms, are not as well received on new platforms like YouTube. This is clearly a space where future research could be conducted regarding why a user's attention to a topic may differ depending on the platform or medium that are consuming it from.

In regards to the relationship between the format of the news being discussed and the levels of user engagement a video received response to RQ2, there are some notable trends as well. The first of these was that the most engaged with format was round table discussions. Across all four of the types of engagement, views, comments, likes and dislikes, (Table 5.6) round table discussions performed the best. This data lends support to the theory of parasocial interactions between audiences and on screen personas (Horton & Wohl, 1956) in that the more conversational style of presenting the news encourages audiences to join in with that conversation, whether through the form of liking or disliking the video or more actively engaging through the form of writing

comments. This finding also has the potential to lend support to other areas of research such as in political communications where these styles of interaction between the public and elite institutions or people are a critical area of research (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016; Kreiss, 2016)

This aspect of the data analysed also reinforces the notion that YouTube helps support the public sphere as it empowers the public to take part in the dialogic process necessary for a democratic society (Berger, 2011). With this type of dialogic news presentation being the most popular on YouTube this also raises challenges towards the idea that pure objectivity is something that should be pursued. The call for a more dialogic form of journalism such as by Anderson et al. (1994) would therefore endorse the idea of treating YouTube as a beneficial news platform in regards to the public sphere. Finally in relation to RQ1, it should be noted that whilst the averages suggest a relationship between the format used and the levels of user engagement, when looking specifically at the top 10 and bottom 10 videos in each of the user engagement variables, there is a mix of each of the formats and so once again, the variable whilst seeming to be a good indicator as to how well a news video on YouTube will perform, is by no means the sole determining factor.

It can be argued from the data gathered that there is indeed some relation between the topic and format of a news video on YouTube and the level of user engagement it receives. This relates to this study's overarching question as to what role YouTube plays in a democratic society, because the public can be seen to be engaging with "opinions about matters of general interest." (Habermas, 1964: 49) which is a fundamental part of Habermas' concept of the public sphere. One way the extent of its role can be considered is by taking the wider media ecosystem into consideration. There has been a recent trend within the past decade for news organisations to hide some or all of their content behind a paywall. In 2019, 50% of Americans and a similar number of citizens in other Western countries experienced news content being hidden behind a paywall. (Newman et al, 2019: 12). This can be seen to have damaging effects to the public sphere as a fundamental aspect of Habermas' public sphere is that

“access is guaranteed to all citizens” (Habermas, 1989, 49). The fact that YouTube is open to everyone, albeit necessitating an internet connection, the wide range of news topics being presented on the platform means that it is contributing towards the public sphere. Considering that some of the news organisations analysed have some of their content hidden behind the paywall of a cable TV subscription, the fact that YouTube enables a wider portion of the public to see such content when it is uploaded to YouTube also contributes to the idea that YouTube as a platform is closer to Habermas’ idealised notion of the public sphere.

Where the argument for YouTube being closer to Habermas’s ideal public sphere run into trouble is in the exceedingly open nature of the platform itself. Regardless of if the news organisations are collectively uploading a wide variety of news topics, when the spread of topics covered by each individual network (Tables 6.1; 6.2; 6.3; 6.4; 6.5) is looked at, one sees that there is evidence to suggest that particular audiences do not receive news on a wide range of topics. This is a troublesome point in regards to the public sphere as if people are getting more and more of their news online yet they are still being highly selective in which sources to gain information from, then this would leave portions of the public that are not as well informed as they could be. This coupled with the fact that users of YouTube are unlikely to be consuming every single video uploaded by a single news channel and will be selective in regards to where they consume their news (Garrett, 2009b; Stroud, 2008), means that YouTube may be further from Habermas’s ideal of the public sphere than argued for above.

In response to RQ2, the data collected in this thesis presents both several reinforcements and challenges to existing scholarly ideas regarding the use of language and user engagement. The first idea that is reinforced is that audiences tend to gravitate towards stories that are framed negatively (Trussler & Soroka, 2014). This can be seen in the data where topics such as terrorism, whilst being framed in the most negative language with their titles having an average sentiment score of -1.67 (Table 5.10) also had the highest levels of user engagement (Table 5.5). This is further supported by the data in Tables 5.9 and 6.10 which show that the network with the most negatively titled

videos, TYT, also has the highest levels of user engagement. The data here suggests that negatively framed videos elicit a greater response than more positive ones. This is an important finding as not only does it reinforce works such as that by Trussler & Soroka (2014) but it also lends some support to the notion that news is becoming more sensationalised through the use of language to frame stories (Vettehen et al, 2005; Gans, 2004). This trend is then not only happening on traditional news platforms but also on new ones like YouTube. A second concept that is reinforced by the data is the notion that stories which can be sensationalized are covered more often (Tenenboim & Cohen, 2013; Stroud et al, 2016). The topic of crime was the second most covered topic as well as having the second lowest average sentiment of its video titles at -0.98 (Table 5.10).

One of the challenges to existing notions around news and framing that is generated by the data in this thesis is the fact that the topics of both domestic politics and international politics had only slightly negatively titled YouTube videos with average sentiment scores of -0.27 and -0.29 (Table 5.10). This challenges the conceptions put forward by the likes of Bennett & Iyengar (2010) who suggest that news content has become more polarized over time. If this were the case, then one would expect the language of YouTube video titles covering politics to have more emotionally driven language. The fact that political videos on YouTube are not framed with negative language in their titles is an important finding in that it impacts studies that consider how the framing of a story influences an audience's reception of that story (Iyengar, 1989; Price et al, 1997). Given that hard news stories are more beneficial to the public sphere (Habermas, 1989), one can suggest that the notion that political stories on YouTube are more beneficial to the public sphere due to the fact that they are framed in less negative language than other hard news topics such as education or crime.

RQ3 posed the question of whether user comments on YouTube videos reflect Habermas's notion of the public sphere. Drawing upon the issue raised during the analysis of the case studies in chapter 7, a direct answer to this question is difficult to give.



When one considers that part of Habermas' theory says that citizen interactions in the public sphere should lead to sensible decision making, it is hard to suggest whether any sensible decisions can be made based off the type of comments that are written. Research by Vu (2014) argues that audience metrics, such as user comments, influence editors in gatekeeping. However, given the existing literature around the antagonistic and toxicity of comments within digital platforms (Massanari, 2015), it is hard to see what value gatekeepers could derive from such comments. Whilst content producers may derive little benefit from user comments on YouTube videos, the work of Kwon & Cho (2015) which found "positive effects of swearing on increasing the public's attention and perception toward the comments" (Ibid: 99) may suggest that user comments merely only provide benefit for other users.

A second reason why it is difficult to directly address RQ3 stems from the debates surrounding the function of the public sphere itself. Part of any actors role with the public sphere is to "provide sites for public participation" and "expert accountability" (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994: 10). Given that the news networks themselves can at some level be deemed as part of the elite institutions of society (Davis, 2003; Wedel, 2017), how then do the antagonistic comments hold these institutions to account? Especially when the impact that the comments have is determined by how many people see them, which in the case of YouTube, is controlled by the platforms algorithm. Even though existing research suggests that audience feedback does impact how journalists view their role (Hanusch & Tandoc, 2017), it is still unclear as to the extent that journalists read and engage with the comments left on YouTube videos. This is an important consideration for future research as if the public's call for different news values to be adopted or different topics to be covered by the organisations is not reaching the decision makers at these organisations, then this too would be further evidence that user comments on YouTube are further away from Habermas's notion of the public sphere.

The above points forces this study and future studies to ask whether Habermas' notion of the public sphere is the right theory to use in evaluating the worth of not only user comments but potentially all online news as a whole. Given the seeming impossibility of totally rational discussion within the public sphere, which would require the removal of "social and economic hierarchies" (Gibson, 2019: 2), an alternative approach that places a far lower emphasis on rationality is suggested

By recognising the works of Wahl-Jorgensen (2019), Ruiz et al. (2011) and McNair (2011), a conceptual framework where an emphasis is placed on the value of contextualisation and emotional engagement. Should be considered for future research within this area. Contextualisation remains one of the fundamental roles of journalism (McNair, 2011) and given the clear emotional turn in media studies, but particularly social media that has taken place in recent years (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019), a model that acknowledges how both thoughtful discussions as well as ones which express feelings in an overt way (Ruiz et al, 2011) needs to be developed.

### **8.3: Wider research implications**

The findings from this study raise a number of issues both for news organisations themselves and for broader academic discussions. In both cases these issues have often been considered already in traditional media forms such as newspapers or TV but not as much in the area of YouTube.

One of the key issues raised in this study is that new news networks like The Young Turks, appear to follow many of the same trends that traditional news networks do. For example, traditional networks have tended to have their content focus on more negative or sensational stories as this has been rewarded financially in terms of larger audiences (Kupchick & Bracy, 2009; Melkote, 2009; Dimitrova et al, 2005). TYT can be seen to have copied this trait from traditional news media and the fact that they have the most negatively titled videos and the largest viewing figures speaks to the idea that 'if it bleeds, it leads' is a guiding phrase within the world of news on YouTube.

Similarly TYT can be seen to mimic the type of content that traditional news networks produce in that they focus heavily on politics. Both these points are important findings as it grants legitimacy to the idea that new news networks that do not utilize the traditional platforms of TV and print should be considered for future research wishing to look at comparing various news networks. Whilst there are clear differences in terms of audience demographics (Caumont, 2013; Olmstead et al., 2014), the data analysed in this thesis suggests that YouTube is clearly part of the larger news ecosystem and that due to the levels of cross pollination of content between traditional news platforms and new ones such as YouTube, that news organisations that are native to YouTube should be considered as good examples of media hybridization. The implication of TYT's dominance in terms of audience metrics on YouTube could mean that it has an influencing factor regarding how traditional news organisations produce their content. This is particularly true when adopting Chadwick, Dennis & Smith's (2016: 10) definition of a hybrid media system where it is not just older media logics informing newer ones, but newer media logics forcing behavioural changes on older ones. The extent to which TYT can influence the likes of CNN and Fox News and how this influence would take shape still remains to be seen and would require further research.

A second issue raised regarding journalism studies is how it can appropriately analyse comments left on YouTube videos. Many of the studies discussed in chapter 7 in relation to user comments on news websites often looked at every single user comment written on a story (Santana, 2015; Kwon & Cho, 2015). Whilst this is possible to also do on YouTube, the user interface of the platform makes research that wishes to use a large sample far harder to do. In future, scraping software would be required for any proposed large scale analysis of thousands of comments on YouTube. A corollary issue here is the notion of user-content comments and user-user comments (Ksiazek et al, 2014). Whilst it would be possible to design software to sort out which comments are user-content and which are simply replies to other user comments, future research in this area would still have to bear in mind that some of the user-user comments may in fact be more directed towards the video itself than the initial comment they are replying

to. Additionally a greater emphasis on qualitative approaches could be considered when analysing user comments on YouTube. This point is echoed by Thelwall (2017) who says that “social media analytics methods are almost inevitably exploratory” (Ibid: 314) and therefore, “a radical mixture of methods coupled with renewed critical reflection”(Savage & Burrows, 2007 cited in Thelwall, 2017: 314).

The importance or value of comments for the news organisations themselves is an issue that this study raised as well. As detailed in chapter 5, videos that receive a large number of comments also tend to perform well when it came to other measurements of user engagement. However, as the case studies in chapter 7 highlighted, these comments can oftentimes be unconstructive, offensive or totally irrelevant to the video. Measurements of engagement are viewed by those in both YouTube (Chatzopoulou et al, 2005) and the news industry in general (Kramer, 2016) as metrics of success. However this study, when taken in the context of other research looking at the value journalists place on user comments (Nielsen, 2012; Tenenboim & Cohen, 2013; Almgren & Olsson, 2015; Krebs & Lischka, 2017), calls into question the extent to which news organisations should put value on YouTube user comments. If quantity of engagement is the focus of news organisations then this issue is not as large a concern. However, if news organisations wish to find value in user engagement beyond raw numbers then more work needs to be done investigating how value can be extracted from user comments on YouTube videos.

Once a more nuanced conceptual framework like the one outlined above has been further developed, future academic discussions should also consider not only the value that YouTube comments provide to the functioning of a democratic society, but whether this value is different in any way to comments left on other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter or on the native websites of news organisations

One of the main findings of this study is the stark difference in terms of user engagement success between legacy news organisations such CNN, Fox, BBC and AJE, and new news organisations such as TYT. TYT’s videos on average received far

more views, likes, dislikes and comments compared to the others. Whilst one might expect that organisations with a large amount of resources and an already established audience across other platforms would be able to outperform relatively smaller and newer organisations, this does not appear to be the case. Given that TYT appears to mimic many of the approaches to news that traditional news networks use, namely negative language and a focus on politics, the reason for their success on YouTube may lie in a number of factors. The first of these factors was detailed in chapter 3 where the changing demographics and news consumption habits now favour online content that is geared towards younger people (Caumont, 2013). A second factor is that TYT's content is made specifically for YouTube and cannot be found on traditional platforms like cable TV. Given that the other networks analysed in this thesis predominantly uploaded content on to YouTube that had already aired on TV, audiences, if they are inclined to consume their news from CNN, would do so at its point of origin, TV, rather than on a different platform. As the only place to get TYT content is on YouTube, then their entire audience will watch their content there. For networks like CNN, their audience is spread out across multiple platforms.

This goes in hand with another reason in that whilst other networks have to deal with and invest in multiple platforms, TYT's business is focussed on online video platforms and hence will invest all of its effort into its online video content and building its audience there. This would ineluctably lead to a higher quality in user experience. To illustrate this, one can look at the BBC's YouTube channel that performed poorly compared to TYT's in that, whilst TYT uploaded content on a consistent basis, the BBC whilst uploading mainly short videos, also happened to do so on a very infrequent basis. The wider academic implications raised here surround the concept of trust in media. As mentioned in chapter 3, online news media is currently less trusted than traditional platforms (Blöbaum, 2014), despite growing as the main source of information for the public (Geiger, 2019). This issue raises the idea that audiences may just be consuming a narrow band of news sources, ones that they personally deem trustworthy, whilst ignoring all other sources. This has ramifications for the public sphere in terms of whether the citizenry is well informed, but also from a communications research

perspective. As this study shows that TYT has large audience on YouTube communications researchers will have to consider the potential link between the popularity of an online video news source and its actual trustworthiness. This also means that future academic discussions need to consider whether or not there needs to be a greater distinction made in what is meant by 'trust' when it comes to the questions of trust in online media and trust in the media in general. In essence, does the public consider the word 'trust' to have different standards depending on the platform that the news content is on?

A final conceptual issue raised from the data produced in this study is that news organisations may wish to consider what factors are relevant to the overall success of a video. This is an important issue because as the industry moves towards more online video content due to the shift in news consumption trends, trying to maintain a large audience is vital for the revenue stream of advertising. If there are certain factors that predispose a video to generate higher user engagement, news organisations may lean on these factors to the detriment of others. The implications of this could be that news organisations may develop distinct sets of news values for the different platforms that they produce content for. This trend has already been established in online print media (Sambrook, 2017; Kormelink & Meijer, 2017) and further work needs to be done regarding how the elements of what goes into making a news article 'clickbaity' can be transposed onto video platforms such as YouTube. Along these same lines, the issue of to what extent different news values impact the levels of audience attention and retention need to be considered. For instance, does Harcup and O'Neill's news value of 'Relevance' take greater precedence in the decision making process when maintaining an audience's engagement with a story is prioritised.

The research in this study also contributes towards debates around the role of journalism in society and how its role comes into conflict with the realities of running a news organisation in a highly competitive environment. With the notion that news is increasingly pushing sensationalized content (Tenenboim & Cohen, 2013), due to the need to attract audiences, the role that YouTube plays within the current media

ecosystem in accurately informing the public of news events must be considered going into the future.

#### **8.4: Research Limitations and suggestions for future studies**

The implications in this study must be held up against a number of limitations and other considerations.

The first limitation that is likely to have the greatest impact on any conclusions drawn is the data sample that was used. Despite 1239 videos being collected during the data collection period, the spread of videos that each of the networks uploaded was somewhat uneven with CNN uploading over 10 times more videos than the BBC. Whilst this is a noteworthy point in itself, future research must consider not only increasing the scale of the data collection, but also what news channels on YouTube should be considered. Future research may wish to focus on the channels run by print media companies such as the Daily Mail. Also, given that there are now hundreds of YouTube channels that are dedicated to delivering news content, whether it is on a broad range of topics such as channels like Secular Talk, or on a single niche topic such as video games like Jim Sterling, an alternate focus could also be on these smaller channels. These lesser known channels appear to share many similar features to those channels covered in this study such as style, upload frequency and levels of user engagement. Even though news and politics videos make up less than 3% of all channels of YouTube they account for 45% of all video uploads (Bartl, 2018). This, combined with the fact that across all of YouTube “0.64% of videos represent 81% of all views” on the platform (Sinclair, 2019) means that future research needs to be care in drawing broad assumptions across the platform as a whole.

The pursuit of this area of research is important, particularly in relation to citizen journalism studies as many of these types of channels are run by a single person. As technology has developed and improved, citizens have moved from writing their own

blogs analysing the news or current affairs on any given topic, to creating their own videos to explain their analysis that they previously would have just written down. Performing a similar study to this one, looking at the topics covered, language used and levels of user engagement would help reveal whether or not the tactics employed by large news organisations are not only mimicked by individual citizens on YouTube, but also whether these tactics have the same effect or impact regardless of the size of the channel. This would supplement further discussions around the extent to which the process of media convergence is taking place.

One of the normative assumptions made in this study relates to the analysis of user comments. It was assumed that comments written on YouTube videos were done with some purpose or intent on the end of the user. Without this assumption being made, further justification is required in order to ascribe any value of worth to any of the comments analysed.

Another normative assumption made in this study is that the best way to determine the impact that emotion has on levels of user engagement is by analysing the titles of the videos. This assumption was made as at the time of data collection, YouTube had not implemented its 'Thumbnailer' tool which used "artificial intelligence to automatically generate the most compelling portions of a video" (Matsakis, 2017). Due to this, the role that a video's thumbnail could play in determining user engagement was under appreciated. As pointed out by Heusner et al (2019), there is currently a large amount of scope for future research to help understand how this new critical aspect of the platform influences the decision making process for content creation on YouTube.

A further limitation of this study is that each of the five networks that were chosen were all English language, western news networks. This means that any conclusions drawn are restricted to the western news ecosystem. Whilst it may be the case that news networks in other languages may exhibit similar trends and data patterns, one should be hesitant in applying conclusions from this study to all news networks on YouTube. Future research is necessary to determine whether the predominance of negatively



sentimented words is a universal trend across all news videos on YouTube or whether this is limited to just western networks. As this study has focused on largely western news organisations, any claims made by this study are only applicable to at most, to other organisations and YouTube channels that have similar newsroom culture. This would be important research as it would help enhance discussions around the ideas of universal concepts in the field of journalism.

Another potential limitation of this study related to the data sample, is the time period during which the sample was taken. This could be deemed too small a timeframe from which to collect a data sample for the purposes of this study. To illustrate the potential problems this can cause, one can look at the final day of data collection, 14th November 2015, in which Paris suffered a large terrorist attack that subsequently dominated the news for several days and weeks afterwards. Whilst videos covering the topic of terrorism made up 5% of the total sample, had the data collection started on the 14th November, then the data would have skewed far more heavily in terms of total coverage of terrorism related news stories. Unique news events such as the Paris terrorist attack are likely to impact any research dealing with news content and coverage and whilst these events are impossible to predict, having a larger sample size would have diminished any impact these events may have on the total data sample. A potential remedy to this limitation would have been to use a random sampling method across a much wider timeframe. Although this would have reduced any problems caused by unique events such as the one mentioned above, due to the manner in which the sample had to be collected, that is scrolling down through each of the channel's list of uploaded videos, obtaining a random sample in practical terms would have been very difficult.

An additional limitation is that the data sample is a snapshot in time. The reason why this is a potential issue is that any of the videos in the sample could post data collection, have gone viral and significantly increased its user engagement metrics. Again, the impact of this issue could have been mitigated by using a random sampling method

across a much larger time frame but as mentioned, practical limitations prevented this approach.

A further area of study that would provide depth to understanding YouTube as a news platform is in researching the ethnography regarding YouTube commenters. Although this would be difficult due to the anonymous nature of many online interactions (Jardine, 2016; Hong & Li, 2017), it is not impossible as demonstrated by Wu & Atkin (2016). The purpose for academic pursuit in this area would be to add the much needed deeper context regarding possible motivations behind why people leave comments. By further understanding these motives, more can then be read into the usefulness of those comments both in relation to their contribution to the public sphere and also in relation to the business side of news organisations in terms of how much attention should be paid towards the criticism in those comments.

A final, broader question that future research needs to consider surrounds the question of what makes a news video on YouTube successful? There are a range of factors such as levels of user engagement, an audience's ability to recall information, the dialogic presentation of the content and the actual visual nature of the content itself, that should all be considered in regards to how successful as a news platform YouTube really is.

## **Appendix A:**

### **Coding framework:**

#### **V1. ID**

An individual identification number assigned to each video. ID number = n+1.

#### **V2. Date**

The date that the video was uploaded. Format for date is dd/mm/yy.

#### **V3. Network**

The news network that uploaded the video. Shortened to their three letter acronym.

1. CNN
2. Fox News
3. AJE
4. BBC
5. TYT

#### **V4. Topic**

The predominant subject of the video. Whilst some videos may cover multiple subjects, it is the main one which will be recorded.

1. Crime
  - a. Any video that relates to the notions of criminal activity. This can take the form of any breaking of the law, actions of the police force, discussion about the police and individual crimes. Crimes committed in other countries should still be coded under the category of crime.
2. Entertainment
  - a. Any video that relates to any form of the entertainment industry. This involves sport, film, the arts and anything pertaining to culture.
3. Media

- a. Any video that covers how other elements of the media is covering a story. This includes the criticism/praise of news coverage by media outlets as well as any story that relates to social media campaigns by individuals or organisations.
4. Domestic Politics
- a. Any video that relates to a news story that is situated with the news networks general geographic remit that deals with any issues of politics whether it be election news or new policies.
    - i. BBC and AJE domestic news covers Great Britain
    - ii. Fox News, CNN and TYT domestic news cover America
5. Health
- a. Any video that covers health or the health effects of products.
6. International Politics
- a. Any video that covers the subject of politics that is going on in other countries. This includes foreign elections, changes to policy that other countries make and any talks that take place between two countries, whether they be both foreign countries or between the domestic nation and another country.
    - i. BBC and AJE international politics covers anything outside of Great Britain
    - ii. Fox News, CNN and TYT international politics covers anything outside of America
7. International News
- a. Any video that covers news that is happening in a foreign country that does not involve the politics of that country. (See 6i & 6ii)
8. Science and Technology
- a. Any video that covers the topics of science and/or technology. Some videos may cover other topic areas, but if the focus of the video is on the science/technology aspect, then this topic category should be chosen.
9. Business

- a. Any video that covers business or entrepreneurial endeavours by companies or individuals. This also includes stories about banks.

#### 10. Terrorism

- a. Any video that pertains to acts of terrorism or attempted acts, both domestically and internationally. This involves shootings, bombings and any other action taken by internationally recognised terrorist groups.

#### 11. Weather

- a. Any video that covers meteorological events and the effects of the weather such as flooding, tornadoes, and drought.

#### 12. Education

- a. Any video that covers news relating to educational issues, for example, tuition fees, teaching methods or education policy.

#### 13. Advert

- a. Any video that is an advert either for another show on the network that has uploaded the video, or for a product/service by that network or other company.

#### 14. Miscellaneous

- a. Any video that does not fall into any of the other categories. This can include videos that are an entire show and hence cover multiple other topics. It can also include videos that are oddities, in that they are 'bizarre' stories, for example some world record attempts.

### **V5. Length**

The length of each video in mm:ss format.

### **V6. Format**

The way in which the video is being presented.

1. One to one interview

- a. Any video in which the main way the news is being discussed is in a one to one interview format. This can take the form of an in studio interview or one conducted via satellite link.
2. Produced segment
  - a. Any video in which the main way the news is presented via a produced segment. A produced segment is anything that involves voice over that has been added later, graphics and heavy use of editing. Often these are segments that have been made outside the newsroom and in the field.
3. Monologue
  - a. Any video in which the main way the news is presented is by an individual anchor or reporter solely describing the topic of the video. In some cases, the person giving the monologue may be quickly introduced by another person, but this should still be considered a monologue.
4. Round table discussion
  - a. Any video in which the main way the news is presented is via a discussion with three or more people. These people may either be all in the same studio or some via satellite link. In cases where there are three or more people shown in the discussion, but only two of them speak, this should still be considered a round table discussion.
5. Live reporting
  - a. Any video where the news was being reported live on the ground at an event at the time it was being recorded. Whilst many videos may have “live” written somewhere on screen, this does not necessarily mean that it is live reporting. The key element to this category is the aspect of reporting directly from the scene of an incident.

## **V7. Use of viewer generated content**

If the video contains any content that has been made by a member of the public. This includes mobile phone footage, audio recordings, other videos already uploaded to video hosting sites such as YouTube, Facebook posts and tweets.

**V8. Views**

The number of views that the video has received at the time of coding.

**V9. Comments**

The number of comments that the video has received at the time of coding.

**V10. Likes**

The number of likes that the video has received at the time of coding.

**V11. Dislikes**

The number of dislikes that the video has received at the time of coding.

**V12. Title**

The full title of the video. All formatting such as capitalisation quotation marks and ellipses to be left in.

**V13.URL**

The web address to the video.

**V14. Tag**

Keywords that are associated with the subject of the video. Any additional tags that may become relevant during coding that are not listed in the coding framework should be noted and assigned its own unique coding number. Multiple tags can be assigned to each video up to a maximum of 3.

1. Baltimore
  - a. Any video that covers any news event that have occurred in or are related to Baltimore, Maryland.
2. Religion
  - a. Any video that covers issues of a religious nature, whether it be a specific individual's or an event or organisation.
3. Sport

- a. Any video that covers any sporting event, organisation or individual sportsperson.
4. Nepal
    - a. Any video that covers any news event that have occurred or are related in Nepal.
  5. UK Election
    - a. Any video that deals with the election in the United Kingdom. This includes speculation, results, party news, policy announcements, etc.
  6. Weather
    - a. Any video that covers weather events anywhere in the world. Whilst this tag should always be applied to Topic Category 11, it can also be used for other topics as well, where the weather is not necessarily the main focus of the video
  7. Royal baby
    - a. Any video that covers the royal baby between Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.
  8. Medical technology.
    - a. Any video that covers issues about advancements and innovations of technology within the medical field.
  9. NASA
    - a. Any video that makes reference to NASA.
  10. Cuba
    - a. Any video that covers issues related to Cuba such as Cuban culture, business or its international relations.
  11. N. Korea
    - a. Any video that covers issues related to North Korea such as its culture, business or its international relations.
  12. 2016 Election
    - a. Any video that deals with the 2016 election in America. This includes news about candidates, media coverage of the election or how the election has an impact on external factors such as foreign relations or domestic policy.



### 13. Benghazi

- a. Any video that covers events that happened in Benghazi, Libya. This includes any legal actions or claims about the attack that took place in 2012.

### 14. Clinton

- a. Any video that covers either Bill or Hillary Clinton, as well as any of their charitable works such as the Clinton Foundation.

### 15. Celebrity

- a. Any video that covers news about celebrities. People should be considered celebrities if they are a well known individual in the media due to their work on television or film, such as actors or sportsmen. Well known politicians should not be counted as celebrities

### 16. Politicians

- a. Any video that focuses specifically about an individual politician's personality, lifestyle, demeanour, looks etc. Videos that deal with a politician's voting record or support for specific policies, but focus on how this will affect the politician, should also include this tag.

### 17. Animals

- a. Any video that covers any news relating to animals or animal rights.

### 18. Children

- a. Any video that covers news that deals with child issues or involves children. A child is anyone who is under the age of 16.

## **V15. Notes**

Any additional notes by the coder that may want to be referred back to later during analysis.

Examples:

Whole show

Just for YouTube

Graphic image warning

Duplicate of ID 155

Program advert  
Not in English

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