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**Evaluating the role of media in fostering political engagement among young people in the UK: A comparative analysis of social and legacy media coverage of political events and contribution to feelings of political empowerment**

**by**

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**for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1: Research context and researcher positionality .....	1
1.2: A blueprint for analysis: thesis aims and research questions.....	6
1.3: Outlining the methodology .....	11
1.4: Setting the bounds: Structure and organisation of the thesis.....	12
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	14
2.1: Discussing political engagement: Key concepts and their relations.....	14
2.2: Contextualising political engagement: Youth involvement and social media uptake.....	22
2.3: The commodification of the political.....	26
2.4: Media diversity, social realities and culture transmission.....	33
2.5: Assessing the emancipatory potential of social media .....	43
2.6: Reconciling the literature with researcher positionality .....	47
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	49
3.1: A three-tiered design: Methodological overview.....	49
3.2: Laying the groundwork: An exploratory and computer-mediated content analysis .....	54
3.3: Understanding youth engagement: Using IPA interviews.....	58
3.3a: Philosophical underpinnings.....	60
3.3b: Justification and alternatives to IPA .....	63
3.4: Quantifying social media uptake and political engagement: A self-report questionnaire.....	65
Chapter 4: An exploration of four cases of political coverage as distributed by British broadsheet newspapers.....	74
4.1: Legacy media coverage of four political events: Justifying case selection .....	74
4.2: Exploring legacy media coverage: The process of sampling and analysing selected articles.....	75
4.3: Scottish Referendum 2014 .....	77
4.4: British General Election 2015 .....	82
4.5: Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 .....	86
4.6: Anti-Fracking campaign 2014-2015 .....	90
4.7: Bringing the cases together: Building a typological map of legacy media coverage.....	94
Chapter 5: Exploring Twitter and legacy media coverage of two political events.....	97
5.1: Outlining the role of social and legacy media in the coverage of political events .....	97
5.2: Mixed method approaches to sampling: Defining the process of analysis .....	99
5.3: Computer-mediated analysis of the coverage of the General Election 2015 .....	101
5.4: Computer-mediated analysis of the coverage of the Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 .....	109
5.5: Discussing the Twitter and legacy media coverage of political events .....	116
Chapter 6: Exploring youth attitudes and feelings toward politics and their involvement with both social and legacy media .....	122

6.1: Contextualising the approach and importance of IPA.....	122
6.2: Introducing the participants: Sample selection and process of analysis.....	125
6.3: Developing the themes: Unpacking the results of analysis.....	129
6.3a: “The digital native vs. the digital immigrant” .....	130
6.3b: “Solidarity online, alienation offline” .....	138
6.3c: “Legacy media as a method of government” .....	146
6.3d: “Redefining the political dialogue?” .....	154
6.4: Returning to the literature: Discussing the testimonies.....	161
Chapter 7: Quantifying young people’s use of and attitudes towards social and legacy media .....	170
7.1: Discussing changes to young people’s media use and the impact this may have on politics .....	170
7.2: Constructing and disseminating the questionnaire: Defining sample selection .....	174
7.3: Methods of analysis and statistical results.....	177
7.4: Elaborating on the statistics: a discussion of the results.....	186
Chapter 8: Discussing the impact of media on youth political engagement .....	194
8.1: The mixed methods approach: Consolidating the findings .....	194
8.1a: How do legacy and social media differ in their coverage of political events? .....	197
8.1b: How is the use of legacy and social media linked to political engagement in the lived experience of media users?.....	202
8.1c: Is there a measurable association between legacy and social media use, political efficacy, self- efficacy and self-esteem?.....	207
8.2: Evaluating the methods: strengths and limitations.....	209
8.3: Reflecting on the process: Potential for future work and concluding remarks.....	212
References .....	215
Appendix.....	244
Appendix 1: Pilot Study of the European General Election 2014 .....	244
Appendix 2.1: Scottish Referendum 2014 Coding Sheet.....	253
Appendix 2.2: The British General Election 2015 Coding Sheet.....	256
Appendix 2.3: Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 Coding Sheet.....	259
Appendix 2.4: The Anti-Fracking campaign 2014/15 Coding Sheet .....	262
Appendix 3: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Interview Schedule.....	265
Appendix 4: Quantitative Questionnaire.....	268
Appendix 5.1: Chris’ Transcript.....	275
Appendix 5.2: Louise’s Transcript.....	292
Appendix 5.3: Peter’s Transcript .....	309
Appendix 5.4: Teresa’s Transcript .....	320

## **Abstract**

The following thesis examines the impact of social and legacy media on young people's political engagement as well as on their attitudes to, feelings towards and beliefs about politics. This was accomplished using a three-tiered design which integrated both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The aim of this design was to ensure that young people were afforded a voice in the ongoing debate around youth apathy. To this end, a direct comparison of social and legacy media coverage of various case studies was undertaken. This initial comparison was accompanied by a series of interviews using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The interviews focused on individual engagement with politics and social and legacy media, in order to get a sense of each individual's understanding of their role in British politics as well as the feelings and attitudes towards media and politics more widely. The three-tiered design concluded with a quantitative questionnaire assessing governmental trust, political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem by way of a series of standardised measures. From this mixed-methods approach, two main findings arise. Firstly, that social media such as Twitter hold the potential to facilitate political engagement in young people, beyond what is currently achieved by the British legacy media. The second finding suggests that there has been a fundamental paradigmatic shift of youth conceptions of politics from what could be considered traditional political behaviours (such as voting and party membership; Strømsnes, 2009) to lifestyle orientated choices (such as boy/buycotts; Copeland, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, Copeland & Bimber, 2014), mediated by social media. Overall the results of the thesis foster a dualistic understanding of British young people who are simultaneously engaged with and apathetic toward "politics" dependant on how the term is defined.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The following chapter provides context for the thesis and discusses the researcher's positionality, outlining the interdisciplinary nature of the work. It also covers the research aims and focus. *Sections 1.2 and 1.3* provide an overview of the thesis, identifying how the various chapters link to one another as well as their relation to the methods employed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how the constituent parts of the methodology combine to answer the presented research questions.

### 1.1: Research context and researcher positionality

The term "Youthquake" was defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018) as "a significant cultural, political, or social change arising from the actions or influence of young people" and was voted 2017's word of the year (highlighting its place in the public consciousness). The importance of this term should be apparent, as it directly contradicts the widely held belief that British young people are uniformly apathetic (Armstrong, 2005; Henn, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005). With this in mind, this thesis seeks to examine the impact of social media platforms (in particular Twitter) and legacy media (specifically broadsheet newspapers) on young people's political engagement and their associated attitudes, feelings and beliefs. In order to provide some context for the content contained within the current work, it is worth addressing the perspective from which it was written. The work on researcher positionality is particularly important in this endeavour as it highlights how individual biases do not necessarily inhibit the relative contribution of the work (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013) and how in some ways they can be levered to add additional value.

By adopting a media psychological approach when exploring youth engagement with media and politics, some broad assumptions are adopted by the researcher. The most notable of these is a person-centred approach focused on individual agency rather than audience effects. By focusing on young people specifically and using a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative methods (commonplace within the field of media psychology), the work addresses a perceived gap in the literature which arguably neglects attitudinal and agentic explanations of reduced or varying engagement in young people.



There has been a long debate within the literature about the effects of media on political communication and discourse. A dominant view that has emerged from the wider debate is that media platforms influence both political engagement and feelings of empowerment in their audiences (e.g. Levy & Rickard, 1982). However, with regards to the exact role of media in political communication, the literature is divided, particularly in relation to the extent to which media promotes engagement. Academics engaged in the discourse argue that the media serve an important role as a catalyst for voter participation (Dalton, 2002; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Norris, 2000; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2003). For example, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) and Hochschild (2010) put forward the notion that the quality of citizenship and health of democratic society as a whole is inextricably linked to availability of the political information distributed by the legacy media; thereby affirming the positive relationship between political knowledge and the act of voting. That being said, others emphasise the media's role as a significant factor contributing to public cynicism, political inefficacy and disengagement (e.g. Armstron, 2005; Balmas, 2012; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Levy & Rickard, 1982).

The rise of social media as a source of news and a platform for political communication (Hansard Society, 2012) has reinvigorated the debate on media influence in political communication. Research undertaken by the Pew Research Centre (2013) highlights the extent to which young people have taken up the platform, but does not illustrate the extent to which the technology has been integrated into daily life (Turkle, 2011). The social shift online by young people represents an opportunity both socially and politically. Socially, the shift allows for membership to a variety of groups and the creation of a digital culture unique to its users, encompassing its own social norms and behaviours (Burgess, Foth & Klæbe 2006). Politically, social media provide access to a wider range of information, arguably leading to a more informed electorate (Hochschild, 2010), as well as facilitating engagement both on and offline during civic and political events (Howard, 2011; Fuchs, 2012; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliviera, 2012). The contribution of social media to both the social and political spheres highlights its importance when discussing the political lives of British young people.

The current work represents an interdisciplinary endeavour, drawing upon a number of different academic approaches including psychology, media studies and political communication. An interdisciplinary stance has been taken due to the contributions of each of these disciplines to the overall question posed by the thesis. Psychological literature provides insight into how young people engage with the political sphere through internal mental processes. In addition, it also illustrates how

societal factors influence these internal cognitions. Media studies contribute to a different facet of the research by outlining the societal role of the media, how it disseminates information as well as providing an analysis of the underlying structure of media systems. Finally, literature relating to political communication offers insights into the relationship between politics, the media and citizens, as well as about how political information is distributed by the media - both online and off.

The three disciplinary areas are integrated in a media psychology approach, where the thesis is positioned. Media psychology explores the relationship between the media and human behaviour. Specifically, this work focuses on how media platforms frame current events and how this framing influences feelings, attitudes and behaviour. Particular emphasis is placed on the impact of this framing on internal mental processes, such as perceptions of agency. Given the media psychology positioning, the thesis adheres to American Psychological Association (APA) writing conventions and style. However, due to the interdisciplinary nature of the work, some concessions have been made - both in terms of the organisation and structuring of the thesis, as well as the areas considered in the literature review.

To contextualise the work contained in this thesis, it is important to define what is meant by “political engagement”, “legacy media”, and “social media”. Political engagement can be broadly understood to be an individual’s direct involvement with the political system in which they occupy. Strømsnes (2009) defines this in terms of constitutional engagement which encapsulates party membership and voting; however this is problematic given the nature of contemporary youth engagement (McIntyre, 2012) and as such is explored more fully in subsequent chapters. The term legacy media is used to refer to the traditional means of mass communication and expression that existed in the analogue era. Television, radio, magazines, books and newspapers are considered to constitute the industries that make up the legacy media under this definition. In terms of social media, this thesis employs a combination of definitions provided by van Dijk (2012) and Boyd and Ellison (2009). Van Dijk’s (2012) definition provides an overview that focuses on the structural (integration and interactivity) and technical (digital code and hypertext) components of social media. To van Dijk (2012), the most important structural aspect of social media is the integration of a wide range of communication platforms (telecommunications, data communications and mass communications; Crosbie, 2006). By integrating each of these communication tools, the platform ensures that all multimedia messages are unified by the use of a general digital code (which facilitates easy transmission via wired and wireless broadband connections). The secondary structural component of

social media identified by van Dijk (2012) is that of interactivity. Simply put, the platform facilitates bi-directional or multilateral communication that can be both synchronous and asynchronous, allowing for greater control to be exerted by the user, in terms of time taken to respond, upload or remove content. Supporting the structural aspects of van Dijk's (2012) overview, is the technical component. This technical component facilitates the integration of the various communication platforms via "hypertext"; a feature that can potentially link the wide variety of data found upon one platform to another.

Linking to van Dijk's (2012) definition of social media, Boyd and Ellison (2009) go on to define one particular type of these platforms; the social network. Boyd and Ellison characterise social networks like Facebook by drawing on three main features. Firstly, these systems allow individuals to create a network that can be widely accessible, or restricted within a bounded system. Secondly, these platforms provide links to other users, to which the owner of the profile has some connection. Finally, users are able to utilise these connections to traverse the network made by other users within the system (Boyd and Ellison, 2009). Boyd and Ellison's (2009) definition goes some way to clarifying how social media may contribute to the psychological components of this thesis; most notably self-esteem and self-efficacy. At this juncture, it is important to note that not all social media share the same focus and for the purpose of this thesis Twitter will be the focal point. This decision was made based on the primacy attributed to Twitter as tool for various forms of political engagement; whereby it can be argued to facilitate a continuous discourse between political actors (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013), provide more information on contemporary politics for those expressing an interest in such (Gottfried, 2014) and to facilitate engagement overall, be it constitutionally or non-constitutionally (Fuchs, 2012; Papacharisi & de Fatima Oliviera, 2012). However, it is acknowledged that this position is not unanimously supported. Future work in this area may be extended to include Facebook, and Instagram but these are not within the scope of the current work.

Further emphasising the importance of social media to the current discussion Turkle (2011) suggests that the online networks facilitate self-esteem and self-efficacy, by allowing users to connect with similar individuals. Considering the importance of these terms to the work at hand, the following definitions are provided. Rosenberg (1979) defines self-esteem as the measure of an individual's perception of their own self-worth, encapsulating both their confidence in their own abilities and self-respect. Self-efficacy is intrinsically linked to self-esteem and is defined by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) as one's belief in oneself to complete a course of action. In many ways it could be considered

the agentic representation of self-esteem. Returning to Turkle's (2011) assessment of social media and extending it to the political realm, greater self-esteem and self-efficacy (which arises from these connections) could be argued to predict political engagement and empowerment (Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna & Mebane, 2009). The growing popularity of social media as one of the main sources of information (and therefore one of the primary opportunities to gain salient political knowledge; Hansard Society, 2012) highlights their importance in an exploration of youth engagement and empowerment.

With Turkle (2011) and Caprara et al. (2009) illustrating how the growing popularity of social media as a platform has facilitated a change in how young people engage with their peers. The most important of these changes (In the context of this thesis) concerns the impact of this phenomenon on political engagement and agency. Traditionally, the easiest way to assess political engagement has been through the use of electoral statistics. With this in mind, it can be argued that voter participation in the UK has seen a steady decline since the early 1990's (though this decline is punctuated by several minor peaks; UK Political Info., n.d.). The decline illustrated by these statistics is replicated in each of the constituent countries that make up the United Kingdom. As such, the cause of low electoral turnouts remains a topic of considerable interest in the literature relating to electoral participation (Gray & Caul, 2000). In this literature, it is generally considered that high levels of education, tolerance, political freedom and socioeconomic status (factors associated in the case of the UK; CIVICUS: Enabling Environment Index Project Team, 2013) are correlated with increased political involvement (Almond & Verba, 1963; Verba & Nie, 1972). However, the reported decrease in engagement focuses on traditional political activities, such as party membership and political lobbying (Strømsnes, 2009) and frequently neglects non-constitutional approaches, such as protests, boycotts/ buycotts or demonstrations (Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 2005). When focusing on these non-constitutional acts, an inverse trend can be seen in which political engagement has been on the rise since the 1970's (Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, Copeland & Bimber, 2014) and is epitomised by the increased membership in single issue groups such as Occupy.

Given the emphasis on engagement with traditional political activities in the academic literature above, young people (those aged 18-25 years old) in this context are frequently cited as amongst the most apathetic and politically disenfranchised populations; an assessment that is mirrored in the public discourse (Armstrong, 2005; Henn, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005). The downward trend is not limited to the UK and is illustrated by a decrease in youth engagement with politics across

Western Europe and the United States (Esser & de Vreese, 2007; López Pintor & Gratschew, 2002). This perceived decline in youth political engagement and its relation to individual agency represents the primary focus of the thesis. With the contemporary discourse so focused on the apathy of young people, an exploration of individual agency would provide some insight as to why youth apathy is so apparent in the national discourse and whether it is truly indicative of individual members of that group. When considering the nature of youth engagement with the political sphere, there is significant debate regarding whether the non-constitutional political actions (such as acts of political consumerism) popular with the group (Baek, 2010; Strømsnes, 2009) should be defined as 'political' (Althusser, 2014). The dominant view within the literature is that these actions are 'apolitical' (Strømsnes, 2009), considering these behaviours are frequently directed towards the market (Stolle et al., 2005) rather than the state. This view supports Armstrong's (2005) earlier assessment that young people are politically apathetic, as they do not engage with politics in the traditional manner. However, there are those that suggest that despite the 'apolitical' nature of youth engagement (i.e. protests, boycotts/ buycotts or demonstrations) the group is politically mobile and motivated as shown by Baek (2010), Copeland (2014) and McIntyre (2012). McIntyre elaborates on this notion, by suggesting that young people are choosing to engage with politics in new ways, favouring lifestyle orientated politics where they can perceive the effect of their involvement (Harrison, Newholm & Shaw, 2005; Sørensen, 2004). It is this perception of impact that Baek (2010) and Copeland (2014) suggest inhibits traditional political engagement, but motivates the non-constitutional or apolitical acts undertaken by young people (this is perhaps unsurprising when taking into account the work of Azjen (1991) and Bandura (2001) who highlight the importance of perceived efficacy with regards to the likelihood of repeating a given behaviour). Depending on whether one classifies non-constitutional political behaviours as political or not, a dualistic understanding of youth engagement can be reached; one where young people are simultaneously apathetic and politically motivated. Overall, how an individual chooses to engage with politics (and media coverage of political events) can reflect their perception of their own political agency.

## **1.2: A blueprint for analysis: thesis aims and research questions**

The general aim of the thesis is to explore the impact of legacy and social media platforms on young people's attitudes and feelings toward political engagement and resulting efficacy. The following section identifies the three research questions. These research questions represent a systematic approach to studying how legacy and social media distribute information relating to

political events and the extent to which this informs young people's perceptions of their own political engagement.

*RQ1: How do legacy and social media differ in their coverage of political events?*

Understanding the differences in coverage between social and legacy media in terms of story selection and diversity of coverage is important to unpacking their potential impact on engagement and feelings of empowerment. Within the literature, traditional news media are shown to hold important political and social roles including “periodically attack[ing] and expos[ing] corporate and governmental malfeasance, and aggressively portray[ing] themselves as spokesmen for free speech and the general community interest” (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; p. 1). The more centralised traditional news media is less reflexive in its coverage of civic and political events, often favouring a professional and detached style (Howard, 2011). By comparison, online content creators simultaneously operate as disseminators of key information such as dates, locations and policies (in the case of political coverage) and as motivators, fostering debate on and offline (Park et al., 2015); frequently more rapidly than their legacy media counterparts. These differences in role and distribution methods arguably impact self-efficacy and self-esteem; both strong predictors of engagement, politically and civically (Caprara et al., 2009). The differences between legacy and social media distribution methods are explored and evaluated in relation to their impact on engagement in those aged 18-25.

*RQ2: How is the use of legacy and social media linked to political engagement in the lived experience of media users?*

Returning to Delli Carpini and Keeter's (1996) and Hochschild's (2010) statements linking political knowledge to political engagement, it can be argued that trusted reporting is more likely to produce greater engagement; downplaying the importance of political knowledge overall. However, as illustrated by Armstron (2005) and others (Esser & de Vreese, 2007; Henn, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005) that is not always the case and as such, requires a more detailed exploration of media trust and usage. The methods employed within this thesis attempt to provide the detailed exploration alluded to here. This is achieved by focusing on the importance of lived experience, understanding how young people engage with both the political sphere and how the reporting of political events is inherently tied to their own individual efficacy and perceptions of agency (as well as trust in those disseminating that information). By employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative assessments of youth

engagement, the thesis goes some way to addressing a perceived gap in the literature - which for the most part attempts to simply quantify how many young people are “engaged”. The application of a mixed methodology goes beyond simply addressing the perceived gap in the literature, but is integral to fully unpacking the constituent components of young people’s experience of politics and political reporting. The works of Azjen (1991) and Bandura (2001) provide several broad concepts such as attitudinal beliefs (i.e. trust) and affect (i.e. feelings towards a topic of interest) that impact behaviour, which are useful in facilitating any exploration of youth political engagement. Understanding the lived experience of young people through the application of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis provides a somewhat unique perspective on an individual’s notable attitudinal beliefs, their accompanying affect and how these in turn interact with their own feelings of agency (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Conrad, 1987). Put simply, it allows for the researcher to explore how people feel about media and politics in addition to how they came to hold their current beliefs regarding their own political engagement.

Both Azjen (1991) and Bandura (2001) highlight the interaction between attitudinal beliefs and affect on behavioural outcomes. Additionally, Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2000) illustrate how trust in a brand predicts the likelihood of purchasing a product again. With these works in mind, it can be argued that trust in a politician or governmental party (brand) will predict engagement with particular news sources, as well as exposure to political content and political engagement (as suggested by Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochschild, 2010). It is for this reason that political trust (encapsulated by the Governmental Trust measure in subsequent chapters) is integral when examining the impact of media platforms on young people’s attitudes towards political engagement and feelings of empowerment. Both Ajzen’s (1991) and Bandura’s (2001) models highlight a reciprocal relationship between the components, which suggest that the outcome of a behaviour is as equally valuable when determining engagement as attitudinal belief and affect (emphasising the need for an exploration of lived experience rather than simply quantifying trust). Jenkins (2006) illustrates the interconnectedness of attitudinal beliefs, behaviour and affect in the context of *Survivor* spoiler threads (online forums where users discuss the TV show *Survivor*), where exposure to the previous “correctness” of a user predicts future trust in that individual; leading future evaluations of that user to be made more favourably and enhancing engagement with the discussion.

Building upon the importance of trust, it can be argued that differences in story selection, presentation and dissemination all play a part in impacting political efficacy, either through

inhibiting/facilitating trust in politics, news organisations or both, or by simply presenting a particular group as either politically mobile or apathetic. This dichotomy is commonly presented in the literature as either a virtuous circle - where positive coverage promotes greater engagement with politics - or a spiral of cynicism - where negative or conflicting coverage promotes apathy (Casteltrione, 2016; Curran et al. 2014). Balmas (2012) among others, provides an example of the former where negative portrayals of politicians or political groups can be seen to influence perceptions of those groups and therefore trust in those individuals (Lichter, Lichter & Amundson, 2000; Moy, Xenos & Hess, 2006); whereas Henn, Weinstein and Forrest (2005) illustrate the latter description of British youth as apathetic, reinforcing the position advocated in the national discourse. Depending on the extent to which young people “trust” these sources and the actors presented within them, there is potential to impact the group’s perception of itself, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby they largely become the apathetic group alluded to by Armstron (2005) and the national press. However, Curran et al. (2014) suggest that this debate is in some ways a false dichotomy and that both positions are partly right. Building from the data derived from 11 different countries they suggest that there is a need to shift from this binary simplicity and adopt a more complex understanding of the relationship between media coverage, trust and political engagement. With this in mind, the current work seeks to strike a similar balance by acknowledging the positive and negative aspects of media coverage regardless of origin and attempting to illustrate how this coverage may impact political efficacy and agency.

*RQ3: Is there a measurable association between legacy and social media use, political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem among young people?*

Contemporary literature has argued that legacy media have played a part in inhibiting political engagement by impacting negatively on self-esteem and self-efficacy (Balmas, 2012). However, contradictory to the overall decline in political engagement (Henn, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005), the use of social media has facilitated an increase in life-style orientated politics (Copeland, 2014). The third research question seeks to identify the association between social and legacy media use on political efficacy, self-efficacy and self-esteem and whether these are important in predicting political engagement based on level or extent of use.



Turkle (2011) suggests that young people identify as users of social media and that frequency of use can promote self-esteem and empowerment. The following quote by one of Turkle's many interviewees demonstrates what is meant by young people identifying as users of social media:

"I don't use my phone for calls any more. I don't have the time to just go on and on. I like text, Twitter, looking at someone's Facebook wall. I learn what I need to know" (pp. 15)

The quote illustrates the importance of control, ease of access and the ability to engage when and where they want. According to Turkle, the promotion of self-esteem, empowerment and agency is due to the asynchronicity of discussion and that "technology makes it easy to communicate when we wish and to disengage at will" (pp. 13) thereby allowing greater control over the discourses we engage in. This impact of this perceived control can be seen to feed into both Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour and Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory of mass communication, where it impacts not only self-esteem (as alluded to by Turkle) but self-efficacy and engagement. In this context, the increase in efficacy has been shown to be a significant factor in predicting behavioural outcomes in both Ajzen's (1991) and Bandura's (2001) models; in the context of the current work, this constitutes political engagement. Based on Turkle's (2011) assertion that young people identify strongly as users of social media, both as consumers and content creators, it could be argued that given the poor newspaper readership in those aged 18-25 (Hansard Society, 2012), young people do not engage with legacy media. There are several reasons that may cause this, ranging from story selection to the portrayal of public figures (Balmas, 2012; Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Moy, Xenos & Hess, 2006); all of which have been argued to impact self-efficacy, self-esteem and feelings of helplessness (Levy & Rickard, 1982) which can all be linked back to Ajzen's (1991) and Bandura's (2001) models. In this context, the notion of helplessness is important given the links made by Levy and Rickard (1982) between media portrayals of political figures and individual political efficacy and agency. In their paper they refer to this phenomenon as learned helplessness. Levy and Rickard suggest that through these portrayals a user comes to doubt their own efficacy and instead of attempting to engage, they resign themselves to the belief that they cannot make any form of meaningful change and in doing so decline to engage all together. This position is supported by Landry et al. (2018) who demonstrate the same phenomenon in the context of pro-environmental actions amongst 437 Canadian university students whilst accounting for alternative explanations of reduced engagement like depression and stress. RQ3 will be addressed through the application of a quantitative questionnaire, using a series of standardised measures to outline associations between the constructs associated with individual agency (governmental trust, political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem). The findings will be used in conjunction with those of the earlier qualitative approaches to broaden the results and aid generalisability.

There are some notable points of contention about the emancipatory potential of social media regarding an increase in political engagement, when compared to legacy media; an important facet to address when answering *RQ3*. The first point of contention arises in relation to the concerns highlighted by Levy and Rickard (1982) relating to legacy media. They suggest that the content distributed by legacy media organisations has the potential to generate feelings of ineffectuality and low efficacy - both politically and civically. Howard (2012) compounds this threat by suggesting that these messages are likely to appear online, given the presence of news organisations as content creators on the platform, as well as the tendency of social media users to mirror these organisations in terms of style and focus. The second point of contention concerns whether engagement with social media can impede meaningful offline engagement (such as rally attendance or voting) along with a variety of communication practices. Academics within the field suggest that rather than focusing on a lack of youth engagement brought about by social media use there may be only limited “meaningful” opportunities for young people to influence the political world around them; thereby leading to the assumption of apathy (Pontes, Henn & Griffiths, 2017). Holmes (1999) and Turkle (2011) unpack the second aspect of this point by arguing that digital socialisation has the potential to promote a reliance on computer-mediated relationships, which goes some way to contradicting work of Pontes, Henn and Griffiths (2017) but illustrates the complexity of social media agentic impact.

### **1.3: Outlining the methodology**

The thesis employed a mixed-methods approach utilising a three-tiered design, which first examined media coverage of selected ‘political’ events by way of computer-mediated content analysis, before exploring individual aspects of political engagement through a series of qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey. The mixing of methods goes beyond a simple quantitative-qualitative split and extends to a blending of data across methods. This blending was most apparent in the second and third research tiers, which used the findings of previous methods to inform the current analysis. On completion of the final tier, the findings were used in conjunction to evaluate the results of each component, adding breadth and depth to all aspects of the analysis. Furthermore, by using a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative approaches, greater nuance can be achieved (Schrøder, 2012).

The first tier links specifically to *RQ1* and consisted of a content analysis designed to compare the coverage of two political events in selected legacy media and on social media. The second tier

focuses primarily on addressing *RQ2*. Tier two involved a series of interviews conducted using the IPA methodology as outlined by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). This was intended to break down individuals' understanding of the political sphere, their engagement with the media – both online and offline – as well as their political history. The final tier consisted of a quantitative questionnaire, designed primarily to address *RQ3*. It also provided quantitative support for the assessment of *RQ2*, allowing for a greater generalisation of those particular findings. The three-tiered design is described in detail in *Chapter 3*.

The current work takes a person-centred approach, due to the importance of individual cognition in political agency. This is in accordance with other work within media psychology (Hwang, Pan & Sun, 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009) as well as related fields (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 2001; Lyons, 2000). The person-centred approach advocated here is integral, as it allows for a nuanced understanding of how individual members of the target group understand their place within the political system. This approach places a greater emphasis on how the results could be applied to these individuals, rather than attempting to make broad statements about political engagement as a whole. This was achieved by unpacking how individuals perceive their role in society and why they do or do not engage with politics, using methods which emphasise individual experience and cognition as their points of measurement. By doing this, the study addresses a gap in the literature which frequently seeks to simply quantify youth engagement rather than determine what prompts young people to either distance themselves from politics or engage in activity described as non-constitutional or 'apolitical'.

#### **1.4: Setting the bounds: Structure and organisation of the thesis**

This thesis is arranged into eight chapters, beginning with a review of the literature in *Chapter 2*. *Chapter 2* highlights the key areas of interest of the thesis, providing definitions and links between the topics of study before highlighting the importance of assessing youth engagement both online and offline. Building upon the theoretical background covered in the previous chapter, *Chapter 3* outlines the three-tiered methodology employed within this body of work, illustrating how the methods map onto the concepts outlined in the literature review. Furthermore, this chapter provides justification for the methods as well as acknowledging potential alternatives. *Chapters 4* and *5* concern the analysis of media coverage. *Chapter 4* explores four case studies sourced from the legacy media covering a variety of political events, with the aim of contextualising the analysis of subsequent data chapters.

*Chapter 5* integrates both quantitative and qualitative content analyses in order to compare the coverage of selected legacy and social media outlets. *Chapter 6* presents the primary qualitative component of the thesis and employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to help understand the underlying thought processes of sampled British young people in relation to their role within the political arena, their engagement with various types of media as well as their understanding of their own agency. *Chapter 7* discusses a quantitative questionnaire, consisting of two batteries of measures. Firstly, the questionnaire utilises various standardised measures to assess the constituent components deemed to influence self and political efficacy; these include governmental trust, political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Overall, these measures allow for the results of this thesis to be compared more readily with existing quantitative literature, whilst broadening the purview of the earlier qualitative methods. To this end, the second battery of measures used in *Chapter 7* focus on individual usage and opinions of, both legacy and social media; both of which are explored in great depth in *Chapter 6*. *Chapter 8* concludes the thesis by bringing together the findings from *Chapters 5-7* with the aim of addressing the research questions outlined in *Section 1.2*. The thesis culminates in a discussion of methodological limitations and the potential for future work based on these findings.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following chapter provides an overview of the relevant literature and concepts integral to a discussion of the contribution of legacy and social media to political engagement in British youth. In *Section 2.1*, each of the key concepts and their underlying relationships are described, along with their relevance to the outlined research questions. *Section 2.2* provides an overview of political engagement within the UK, before narrowing to characterise youth political engagement specifically. *Section 2.3* explores the processes by which the political sphere is sublimated and commodified (the act of transformation to a commodity) as well as an exploration of the agentic impact that these processes have on British youth. *Section 2.3* culminates with a discussion of the potential for political mobilisation through non-constitutional acts (such as political consumerism) and whether these practices could be adapted for constitutional political engagement. *Section 2.4* explores the methods employed by sampled media outlets (Twitter and the British legacy media) in the transmission of news relating to contemporary political events. *Section 2.4* concludes with an assessment of two psychological theories of culture transmission, linking them to the explored distribution methods. Finally, *Section 2.5* concludes the chapter by discussing the emancipatory potential of social media within the context of the literature and in relation to the British legacy media.

### 2.1: Discussing political engagement: Key concepts and their relations

Contemporary debates within the literature surrounding political engagement hinge on the acquisition of political knowledge (Dalton 2002; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Norris, 2000; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2003) and the extent to which the population is willing to engage with the agenda-setting media (Hansard Society, 2012). However, there is arguably limited focus on the underlying mechanisms that contribute to political engagement within this discussion. The neglected mechanisms include personal agency (notably political efficacy), the transmission of social norms and the formation of public priorities. The interaction of these mechanisms and resulting levels of engagement represents the primary focal point of this thesis. The following section seeks to define mechanisms listed above and in doing so, it will highlight their contribution to a discussion of political engagement within the context of British youth.

## *Agency*

This thesis employs the definition of agency as provided by Bandura (2001) and Jeannerod (2003) which suggests that individuals are considered to be:

Self-organizing, proactive, self-reflecting, and self-regulating, not just reactive organisms shaped and shepherded by environmental events or inner forces. Human self-development, adaptation, and change are embedded in social systems. Therefore, personal agency operates within a broad network of sociostructural influences. In these agentic transactions, people are producers as well as products of social systems. Personal agency and social structure operate as codeterminants in an integrated causal structure rather than as a disembodied duality. (Bandura, 2001; p. 266)

This definition transcends the compartmentalised aspects of agency purported by Hewson (2010). It places significant emphasis on the embedded nature of the individual within social systems and highlights the impact of external sociostructural influences (such as political systems). Furthermore, this agentic definition still allows for the levelled forms of agency highlighted by Hewson (2010), but in a manner that suggests there is more at play than individual belief systems. Additionally, the above definition illustrates how internal mental processes are shown to simultaneously influence and be influenced by external factors such as social or legacy media. Considering the emphasis placed on empowerment within this thesis, agency represents a super-ordinate factor derived from a number of related sub-concepts. These sub-concepts include self-efficacy, self-esteem and political efficacy (Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna & Mebane, 2009); aspects which are alluded to in the above definition provided by Bandura (2001).

The impact of agency on youth political engagement is understated within the literature, assessed only in small-scale case studies where there is only the “assumption” of agency (Amnå, Ekström, Kerr & Stattin, 2009). More frequently, agency is alluded to in these studies as the super-ordinate or emergent concept linking its associated sub-concepts. As such, these studies do not emphasise the importance of self-organization, self-reflection, and self-regulation in individual agency (Bandura, 2001; Jeannerod, 2003). By focusing on agency specifically, rather than its related concepts (self-efficacy, self-esteem and political efficacy), the definition can be applied in a manner that fosters a discussion based on empowerment and mobilization, rather than apathy. The importance of emphasising agency in this way during a discussion of political engagement is due to the tendency of previous studies to categorise young people as uniformly apathetic, ignoring individualised political acts and neglecting their individual experiences of politics (e.g. Armstron, 2005). This approach

attempts to re-align the debate in a way that avoids narrow categorisation and instead facilitates a debate around how engagement could be improved.

### *Transmission of social norms*

Understanding social norm transmission is important when seeking to understand those norms which govern political engagement. Many social norms are unspoken; such as dress codes, eating behaviours or regional accents, whereas others are more explicit, encompassing rules and laws (Cialdini, 2003; Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). These norms are imparted through education (Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2004), interactions with parents, other family members and friends (Pancer & Pratt, 1999) or through media (Armstrong, 2005; Balmas, 2012). The transmission of social norms plays a significant role in setting the boundaries for agency; simultaneously restricting and opening access to particular arenas, as well as stating what is and is not permitted. In this context, social norms are particularly important in defining the role of the citizen within the democratic system (van Dijk, 1997).

By taking a Lockian (1980) or Hegelian (1896) perspective, society itself can be seen as a collection of social norms in which certain freedoms are willingly forfeited in favour of security. In their works both Hegel and Locke state that these forfeited freedoms and the adopted norms promote co-existence between the members of the society and form the basis for the understanding of law. These “norms” differ between societies and dictate what is and is not acceptable/expected behaviour. Althusser (2014) emphasises how the national media can be instrumental in creating and manipulating these norms but also how it is in turn influenced by them; making the national media as much a social construct as the norms it influences. He states that this is achieved through ideological control, whereby social institutions such as the previously mentioned national media, as well as schools, church groups and similar, prioritise and reinforce a particular ideological position (a social norm). Similarly, Habermas’s (1991) work on public sphere illustrates the role of individual citizens in forming these norms by articulating the needs of the society to the state, through what he terms a “public” (a gathering of individuals concerned with societal issues). Considering the significance of these norms (in particular, those norms associated with political engagement) and the role of the media in disseminating them as a primary agenda-setter (Cohen, 1963; Coleman, McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2009; Fuchs & Pfetsch, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006), the following findings of the Hansard Society audit (2012) in relation to political efficacy highlight particular areas of concern:

Most members of the public simply do not think that if they, or people like themselves, were to get involved in politics they could have any impact on the way the country is run... readers of broadsheet (37%), mid-market (37%), red-top (36%) and local newspapers (35%) are all equally as sceptical about their capacity to effect change in the way the country is run. (p. 28)

Latané's (1996) dynamic social impact theory represents the primary method by which to explore the norm transmission highlighted above within this thesis. Broadly speaking, dynamic social impact theory is based upon two main assumptions. Firstly, that culture is a by-product of interpersonal interactions occurring within a dynamic system. Secondly, Latané suggests that social influence techniques are intrinsically tied to any act of communication and as such, those geographically close to others (or able to reach a wide number of individuals, by way of various distribution networks such as social media; Walther & Jang, 2012) are able to influence the uptake of a variety of beliefs and behaviours. Furthermore, Latané's model illustrates the methods by which regional norms (such as accents), or behavioural norms (voting preference or attendance) are disseminated or transmitted throughout a given population. Shi, Messaris and Cappella (2014) demonstrate this phenomenon in the context of anti-smoking public service announcements (PSAs) online, whereby smokers viewing content with positive comments were more likely to pass on or evaluate that content more highly. In addition to explain the means of norm transmission Latané's (1996) model also provides context relating to the role of media in this process, as well as how media organisations are able to exert their influence by way of their large geographic reach and assumed expertise.

Alternative explanations of norm transmission exist (e.g. social identity theory, Tajfel & Turner, 1986 and Terror Management Theory, Greenberg, Pyszczynsky & Solomon, 1986) but are unable to illustrate the significant impact of various media formats as elegantly as Latané's (1996) model, in as much as they represent only singular facets of the larger phenomenon. Furthermore, these alternative theories do not account for the reinforcement of these norms through familial channels and other small scale groups or institutions as suggested by Holmberg and Oscarsson (2004), Pancer and Pratt (1999), or Chaffee and Yang (1990). The emphasis on tangential dissemination as outlined above is of particular importance, as Althusser (2014) states that many social norms are not acquired through direct exposure to the source, but rather they are acquired through familial channels and other small scale groups or institutions.



### *Agenda-setting and influencing public priorities*

The process of forming public priorities (agenda-setting) can be linked to the transmission of social norms. Scheufele (2000) and Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) define agenda-setting as the ability of mass media to emphasise a topic and the audience/public to consider that particular topic to be important. Simply put, the topics covered by key national media are deemed important, purely because they have been included in these outlets. Furthermore, this perception of value is also facilitated by the belief that reporters and editors are experts in their fields and are able to determine whether a topic is newsworthy or not. Any discussion of agenda-setting can be supplemented by Latané's (1996) work which highlights how a platform with low readership, such as a newspaper (Hansard Society, 2012) may generate such a pronounced effect on norm transmission and creation of these priorities by way of the aforementioned perceptions.

Scheufele (2000) suggests there are three common techniques that are employed in the practice of agenda-setting. These are: agenda-setting itself, priming and framing. Framing is exemplified by the work of Leets (2000) and could be considered to generate a form of cognitive bias, where individuals react differently to a topic or choice depending on how it is presented in the source media. Entman (1991) uses the U.S. downing of Iran Air Flight 655 and the Soviet downing of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 to illustrate this point. He suggests that the de-emphasis of agency and victimhood in the American case through the use of adjectives and graphics leads to the audiences understanding of the two events to differ dramatically (he argues the Soviet case was presented as a moral outrage in the American media) despite their overall similarity. Extending from the discussion of framing, Herman and Chomsky (1988) highlight the importance of priming in their propaganda model. In this context, priming is often used in conjunction with framing to produce a memory effect where exposure to an earlier stimulus (or story focus) provokes a particular reaction to a later stimulus. However, it has been argued that both priming and framing are merely constituent parts of agenda-setting itself (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Estobar & Rey, 1997); although there is a call for a more nuanced definition of framing. Scheufele (2000) provides this nuance by emphasising the notion of agenda-setting as a levelled concept. In the adapted definition, priming is subsumed under agenda-setting, with framing described as second-level agenda-setting or frame setting.

Scheufele's (2000) definition of agenda-setting provides a guide for moving between first and second level agenda-setting techniques during the analysis of social and legacy media's impact on

youth engagement. Scheffle's (2000) definition also allows for a focused application of the work of Barthes (1974), Leets (2000) and Herman and Chomsky (1988), who illustrate how various agenda-setting techniques can be used to create particular social (in the case of Barthes, 1974) and political (in the case of Leets, 2000 and Herman & Chomsky, 1988) realities.

Understanding the process of agenda-setting is integral to this thesis, given that it contributes significantly to an individual's perceived role within the political system (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochschild, 2010; van Dijk, 1998). Furthermore, through unpicking agenda-setting it becomes possible to bypass the thorny concept of "salient political knowledge" which de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) highlight as a prime predictor of meaningful political engagement. Additionally as a concept, agenda-setting is semantically neutral and provides a framework to assess the potential contribution of both legacy and social media to engagement (Dalton 2002; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Norris, 2000; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2003), or to cynicism, inefficacy and disengagement (Armstrong, 2005; Balmas, 2012; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Levy & Rickard, 1982). While this thesis does not focus heavily on the role of agenda-setting, it applies the concept and its related principles to help assess the findings and contextualise them within the wider literature.

### *Social media*

Social media as a concept has been previously defined in *Chapter 1*. However, the concept has wider implications in the literature, as the emergence of the internet and social media has called for a significant re-evaluation of what can be defined as mass media or mass communication (Crosbie, 2006). McQuail's (1969) definition of mass communication remains largely relevant, though requires some adaptation in order to bring it in line with more recent technological advances:

Mass communications comprise the institutions and techniques by which specialized groups employ technological devices (press, radio, films, etc.) to disseminate symbolic content to large heterogeneous, and widely dispersed audiences. (p.2)

Crosbie (2006) updates the above definition to account for changes in mass media distribution and usage. These updates focus on personalisation and collective control (Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu & Sey 2009). Van Dijk (2012) supplements Crosbie's (2006) additions by highlighting the convergence of existing forms of mass media within new media constructs. The best example of this is the increased access to telecommunications, data communication and mass communications through a singular device (mobile telephones or tablets) via the internet.

It is acknowledged that branding social media a form of mass communication is somewhat contentious considering its relative youth and the issues with defining its interaction with existing media systems. However, when contextualising this thesis within the wider debate, Cappella's (2017) four hypothetical research vectors (identified for those looking to the future of communications research) help clarify the decision to present social media in this manner. Cappella's research vectors focus on several facets deemed important to social and legacy media ranging from the modelling of interpersonal and social influence to the blurring of the line between broad/narrowcasting. Furthermore, Cappella suggests that methodological approaches exploring these concepts will inevitably fall outside of the remit of the parent field prompting the need for novel methods and definitions. With this in mind, Crosbie's (2006) adaptations of McQuail's (1969) earlier definition of mass communication serve to address several aspects highlighted by Cappella (2017) most notably the importance of user preferences in terms of managing social interactions and customising their experiences online.

The importance of social media in this thesis hinges on the uptake of the platform by youth populations, particularly those aged 18-25; those described as "digital natives" by Prensky (2001). In this context, the term "digital natives" is taken to mean those who demonstrate a fluency in using and understanding digital systems like computers, video games, social media and the internet more generally. There are some that have suggested that the digital lifestyle epitomised by this group has generated a crisis of socialisation. This is particularly apparent in light of a tangible shift away from traditional methods of socialisation at school and with the family (Holmes, 1999). On the other hand, those such as Turkle (2011) suggest there is a level of empowerment afforded by engagement online due to the asynchronicity of the discussion and control over disclosure. These changes in usage have in turn altered patterns of communication and engagement with various interlinked media (Castells et al., 2009). However, it is important to note that not all users show the same affinity for online engagement (van Duersen, 2010), meaning that it may be premature to describe these changes in socialisation as a "crisis".

Given the overwhelming uptake of social media by young people (Hansard Society, 2012; Ofcom, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2013) the platform has facilitated a distinct youth culture in which technology has been integrated into daily life, mediating existing friendships whilst prioritising self-presentation and self-disclosure (Turkle, 2011). It has also fostered a participatory media culture based on the shared transmission of knowledge and user-generated content (Burgess, Foth & Klaebe,

2006; Jenkins, 2006; van Dijk, 2012). The integration of social media into daily life and the availability of a wide range of information can be seen to have impacted political engagement. Copeland (2014), among others (Gil de Zúñiga, Copeland & Bimber, 2013) has suggested that this has encouraged more individualised political behaviours online, such as boycotts and buycotts. However, the extent to which these acts could be considered truly 'political', is up for debate.

### *Political engagement*

Definitions of civic and political engagement are problematic given the "*lack of consensus on what constitutes civic [and by extension, political] engagement*" (Gibson, 2000, p.17). Adler and Goggin (2005) suggest that the definition of civic engagement ultimately depends on the perspective and interests of the definer, but acknowledge the existence of broad definitions. Delli Carpini (n.d) provides one such definition:

Civic engagement is individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighbourhood association, writing a letter to an elected official or voting.

This particular definition is important in that it draws attention to the spectrum of engagement inherent in society, from civic responsibility to constitutional and non-constitutional political engagement (Baek, 2010; Forno & Ceccarini, 2006; Strømsnes, 2009). The constitutional forms of political engagement (voting, party membership etc., Strømsnes, 2009) highlighted by Delli Carpini (n.d.) are clearly illustrated under the banner of "civic engagement" given the references made within the above quote to "writing a letter to and elected official or voting", but it bears repeating that that these forms of engagement have been in decline since the early 90's (Armstron, 2005; Macedo et al., 2005); prompting considerable concern amongst academics and other commentators.

Amidst concerns of decreasing electoral participation, the changing nature of political engagement has garnered a growing interest (This trend is explored in the context of British youth in the following *Section 2.2*). Copeland (2014) and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013) explore the potential changes in traditional conceptions of politics (and how this might impact overall engagement),

emphasising the role of social norms and individual agency in the transition to non-constitutional forms of engagement (notably acts of political consumerism). To these scholars, social media and its users have been instrumental in shifting the boundaries and challenging what could be considered “political” engagement (McIntyre, 2012; van Dijk, 2012). By adopting McIntyre’s (2012) the more positive outlook on youth “political” engagement (one centred on individual agency), Armston’s (2005) claims of apathy must be reassessed, and a more nuanced discussion of media influence in this context undertaken. With this in mind, much of the research on the rise of non-constitutional politics is “Americentric” (Copeland; 2013; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013. Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti 2005), highlighting a need for a more targeted evaluation of other national cases. This thesis seeks to address the limited assessment of the British case by exploring selected constitutional as well as non-constitutional political events and their media coverage. In addition to this, the thesis includes a qualitative assessment of what it is like to grow up with British political coverage and as a member of the British electorate.

## **2.2: Contextualising political engagement: Youth involvement and social media uptake**

Over the last two decades, increased political apathy and a reduction in civic participation have been descriptors frequently applied to the British electorate (Henn, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005). This description is not limited to the United Kingdom. Concerns regarding the increase in political apathy and reduction in electoral participation have arisen in both the United States and continental Europe, suggesting that this trend is indicative of Western society as a whole (Esser & de Vreese, 2007; López Pintor & Gratschew, 2002). The following section seeks to contextualise political engagement more generally before moving to a more specific exploration of youth political engagement. Additionally, the section will conclude by discussing the increasing importance of social media to the discussion of political communication, where it is presented as either destabilising force promoting a passive and apathetic populace, or as a tool that can be used to promote individual agency as well as a more engaged and informed electorate (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2010).

### *Contextualising political engagement within British nationals*

CIVICUS’s (2013) Enabling Environment Index (EEI) provides context for the following discussion of political engagement in the United Kingdom, emphasising the importance of civic freedoms. Supplemented by the work of the Hansard Society (2012) and Ofcom (2015), these sources

allow for a discussion of political knowledge acquisition and how this knowledge is applied within the British situation.

CIVICUS's (2013) EEI quantifies the impact of an "enabling environment" on feelings of empowerment and agency, specifically focusing on how cultural and legislative constructs affect civic engagement. By looking at environmental, cultural and legislative contributions to political engagement as well as individual motivations, a greater understanding of media impact can be achieved. The works of Latané (1996) and others (Chaffee & Yang, 1990; Holmberg & Oscarsson, 2004; Pancer & Pratt, 1999) have illustrated the potential impact of these societal constructs on the acquisition of social norms, in particular those relating to political engagement.

The literature broadly accepts the positive relationship between the acquisition of political knowledge and the act of voting (Dalton, 2002; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Norris, 2000; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2003). However, there is significant division over the exact role the media and other societal constructs play in the process. CIVICUS' (2013) EEI emphasises how tolerance, trust and solidarity within society promotes voter engagement and agency, but also illustrates how restricted political dialogue or reduced media diversity can have the inverse effect. These secondary concerns are linked to the legacy media by some within the literature (Armstron, 2005; Balmas, 2012; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Levy & Rickard, 1982), suggesting that media coverage of politics actively contribute to public cynicism, political inefficacy and disengagement.

Delli Carpini and Keeter's (1996) and Hochschild's (2010) earlier statements regarding the link between political knowledge and the health of democratic society are supported by the findings of CIVICUS's (2013) EEI report. The CIVICUS (2013) report found that the UK is amongst the top 20 countries (15<sup>th</sup> out of 109) in terms of possessing an "enabling environment" for political engagement. However, there are concerns that despite this, political knowledge has declined:

Perceived knowledge of politics also fell in this year's Audit to 44% [referring to those who believe they possess sufficient political knowledge to engage], a decline of nine percentage points, and more people than ever – 15% – claim to know 'nothing at all' about politics. (p. 26)

The illustrated decline in perceived political knowledge mirrors Armstron's (2005) claim that the British population is generally apathetic towards the political sphere. Armstron's assertion is

particularly poignant, considering the mirrored trend in political interest- which is shown to have dropped by 16% since the last audit by the Hansard Society (2012). These findings are accompanied by low political efficacy amongst those sampled in the audit. This lowered interest in politics could be attributed to a perceived lack of agency in the political process (Bandura, 2001; Jeannerod, 2003), resulting from the delegated responsibility of the existing governmental system and lending credence to Armstrong's (2005) overall argument.

When exploring political engagement in United Kingdom, Delli Carpini's (n.d.) work emphasises the importance of voting and interacting with elected officials. In general, the literature tends to focus on these forms of constitutional political engagement (Strømsnes, 2009), while the dialectic between constitutional and non-constitutional engagement is relatively under-researched. With this in mind, this thesis seeks to address this gap, particularly because these non-constitutional acts are frequently associated with youth political engagement (Copeland, 2014; McIntyre, 2012).

#### *Young people and political engagement*

Young people are frequently considered to be amongst the most apathetic and politically disinterested populations in Western Europe and the US, both within the literature and public discourse (Armstrong, 2005; Hansard Society; 2012; Henn, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005; Ofcom, 2015). However, this evaluation is predominantly made in relation to traditional conceptions of political engagement (such as attending rallies, membership to political parties and voting; Strømsnes, 2009). It does not account for non-traditional forms of political engagement such as political consumerism or individualised political action; which are estimated to account for 22-44% of engagement in the United States and Europe (Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Strømsnes, 2009). The following section explores youth involvement with politics, using both the Hansard Society audit (2012) and the findings of López Pintor and Gratschew (2002) to highlight the importance of perceived political knowledge to overall engagement - both constitutional and non-constitutional.

The apathy identified by Henn, Weinstein and Forrest (2005) and López Pintor and Gratschew (2002) is not necessarily indicative of the wider literature surrounding youth culture and engagement. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) illustrate a slow shift to a more positive perception of youth within the field of youth development. Furthermore, as identified by Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013), Copeland (2014), Baek (2010), and Strømsnes (2009), youth can be seen to be at the forefront of dissident, non-constitutional forms of engagement and ultimately pursuing politics in new and diverse ways

(McIntyre, 2012). That being said, youth mobilisation is problematic due to the changes in socialisation and interaction (Castells et al., 2009; Holmes, 1999). There are instances in which constitutional forms of mobilisation have been achieved, such as during the London Riot cleanup in 2011 (Fuchs, 2012) and through e-participation as demonstrated by Woo-Young (2005) in South Korea. However, these are almost explicitly civic acts rather than inherently political ones, leading us to ask: do young people conceive politics in the traditional sense? The works of Copeland (2014) and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013) go some way to answering this particular question, suggesting that youth do not. Their findings suggest that what is political to this group often manifests as individual acts directed at challenging poor ethical practices emphasising lifestyle choices (Harrison, Newholm & Shaw, 2005; Sørensen, 2004) and is supported by the likes of Stolle et al. (2005) and Armstron (2005). With the aim of contributing to this question of youth political engagement, the thesis explores how your participants conceive politics and political engagement.

#### *Access and usage of social media*

Internationally, social media are growing in their prominence as distributors of daily news and information on current events. This growth is particularly apparent for younger age demographics, most notably of those under 35 (Ofcom, 2013; Pew Research Centre, 2013). In the case of the United Kingdom as of 2015, 83% of British adults have the ability to access the internet at home which could be argued as a factor contributing to the increased uptake. In addition, a series of governmental initiatives have been put in place in order to grant internet access to the remaining 17% of British citizens currently without (Downing, 2011; Ofcom, 2015; Office for National Statistics, 2012).

The growing primacy of social media as a source of information on current events, has highlighted the need to assess user access and consumption, notably in relation to political engagement (Esser & de Vreese, 2007; López Pintor & Gratschew, 2002; Ofcom, 2016; Pew Research Centre, 2013). In the UK, social media currently represents the third most significant source for information on current events (39%), after television (85%) and newspapers (46%), as demonstrated by Ofcom's market report (2015); a trend that is also echoed in the US (Pew Research Centre, 2013). However, within the context of the US, social media platforms are rapidly decreasing television's lead (Ofcom, 2015; Pew Research Centre, 2013; Saad, 2013). With this in mind, the Ofcom report can provide additional empirical information relating to usage that can be applied when answering



questions regarding the distribution of and access to politically salient information in the UK. In doing so, these reports provide context to the previously outlined research questions.

Web-based text represents the most popular platform for accessing information regarding news and current events amongst British young people (Ofcom, 2013). 32% of British young people access information on politics and current events through social media. The Ofcom market report (2013) also shows that amongst that population, Facebook (29%) and Twitter (16%) account for 45% of the sources used when seeking information on current events. Unsurprisingly, those aged 16-24 use social media differently to those aged 55+. Firstly, people aged 55+ are more likely than those aged 16-24 to state they read news stories online (62% vs. 49%); while those aged 16-24 are three times more likely to state they read news-related comments on blogs or social media (40% vs. 13% for over-55s). Secondly, those aged 16-24 are more inclined to watch news-related video clips when compared to those aged 55+ (18% vs. 9%) and share these in comments or blogs (10% vs. 3%). However, there are some similarities; watching TV news online and using search engines to seek out news on current events has seen significant growth across both age groups.

In addition to age differences in usage of social media, there also appears to be a gender difference. This is particularly apparent when social media are used for accessing news and information. In this case, 27% of women use social media to access information on news and current events, compared to 19% of men. These demographic differences are supported by the work of both van Duersen (2010) and Courtois, Merchant, De Marez and Verleye (2009). Other access points for news online are the various search engine aggregators such as Google and Yahoo which account for 25% of news access for all users (Ofcom, 2013) a figure which is only marginally higher than that of social media (23%). These figures clearly demonstrate a shift in the audience's consumption of news and current events from traditional legacy media to social media and other news aggregators online, particularly in the case of young people (Ofcom, 2013).

### **2.3: The commodification of the political**

Conventional wisdom attests to the inherently apolitical nature of political consumerism, due to the hierarchical consumer relationship that governs it. However, as illustrated in the previous section, Western youth demonstrates a strong predilection toward consumer acts such as boy/buycotts online (Stolle et al., 2005). The following section examines three key ideas from the

literature that are relevant in the discussion regarding commodification of the political and political engagement in general. Firstly, it explores the role of the media within the political discourse, before discussing the commodification and sublimation of the political sphere by media organisations (Marcuse, 1964). The section culminates by evaluating the potential of political consumerism as a “political” act.

### *The social and political roles of the media*

It has already been noted that the quality of citizenship is tied directly to the prevalence of salient political knowledge (Dalton 2002; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochschild, 2010; Norris, 2000; Pattie, Seyd & Whiteley, 2003). In this context, it could be argued that the primary role of the media in democratic societies is the transmission of this knowledge. With this in mind, the British legacy media perhaps represents the most important transmitter of salient political knowledge considering their role as primary agenda-setters (Fuchs & Pfetsch, 1996; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Herman and Chomsky (1988) suggest that much of the Western legacy media claims to operate under the traditional libertarian principles on which they were founded. However, the extent to which these organisations achieve this differs. Herman and Chomsky themselves suggest legacy media’s adherence to traditional libertarian principles is a necessary illusion to maintain political status quo and operate the media in a market system that benefits the proprietors.

Siebert, Peterson & Schramm (1956) present two models of the press that are of particular interest to this thesis; these being the libertarian and the socially responsible models of the press. While outdated by contemporary standards (Negrine, 1994), they provide an effective baseline from which to compare later models. In these models, the role of the press is to foster the dissemination of ideas, facilitating the creation of an informed and involved electorate. Ultimately:

Instead of being critical, adversarial or even sceptical, the media should bow down to the needs of the country so as to encourage development of all sectors (Negrine, 1994; p. 26)

In addition to exemplifying the perceived role of the press as a disseminator of salient information (in the case of libertarian and the socially responsible models), Siebert et al. (1956) also suggest that the national press:

always [takes] on the form and colouration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the systems of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted. (1956; p. 1-2)

It is for this reason that understanding the historical underpinnings, models and ideological positions of the press is integral to understanding the contemporary discussion surrounding British legacy media.

The differences between Siebert et al.'s (1956) two models centre on obligation and regulation. Like libertarian models of the press, social responsibility models emphasise the need for a free press without censorship. However, unlike their libertarian counterparts, organisations operating under the socially responsible model are willing to adapt their journalistic practices in line with public concern, by internal self-regulation or external censorship. With this in mind, libertarian press models often claim the same civic responsibilities as socially responsible models, but take issue over censorship and highlight secondary concerns relating to financial stability, due to commercial pressures. The presence of the market system is the reason why Herman and Chomsky (1988) - among others- believe that media organisations engage in the practice of commodification (Curran & Seaton, 2009; Marcuse, 1964); a practice that is explored in greater depth later in this section.

Siebert et al.'s (1956) venerable work has inspired a number of adaptations and re-evaluations of the original theories by a series of authors (Christians et al., 2009; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The democratic participation model of the press proposed by McQuail (2002) represents one of these re-evaluations. The model itself provides a framework that can be used to highlight the importance of social media in disseminating political information by way of technological advances that build on the work of individual content creators. The democratic participation model is characterised by how it "favours multiplicity, smallness of scale, locality, deinstitutionalization, [the] interchange of sender-receiver roles, [and] horizontality of communication" (p. 96). Firstly, with regards to 'multiplicity', social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook have millions of users posting millions of events, reports and photos each day. On Twitter alone, there is an average of approximately 500 million new posts per day (Twitter, last updated January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017) drawn from a variety of content creators and media organisations. The large user base and multitude of content creators can be seen to satisfy both the horizontality and deinstitutionalization outlined by McQuail's (2002) model. Secondly, by focusing on the interchangeable nature of sender-receiver roles in this model, there is potential for social media to facilitate a more democratic approach to news coverage, where each user is a potential content creator and contributor to a given topic. This more lateral approach to content creation and distribution could be seen to limit the concentration of power noted by those within the field of political communication (Fuchs, 2014; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Siebert et al.,

1956) as well as foster the transmission of a variety of social norms linked to media use and political engagement (Gil de Zúñiga, Veenstra, Vraga & Shah, 2010; Marichal, 2012).

Returning to Siebert et al.'s (1956) assertion that the press will mirror the social and political structures in which it operates, social media mirror the practices of the agenda-setting legacy media (Papcharissi & de Fatima Oliviera, 2012). Papcharissi and de Fatima Oliviera suggest that the mirroring of legacy media styles online ensures that the two media platforms are inextricably linked when discussing the role of the media in political discourse. However, differences in message dissemination, content and style could be argued to influence the uptake of political knowledge; it is these differences that are explored in the later chapters of this thesis (most notably *Chapter 5*).

### *The sublimation of the political*

The following section explores key ideas and arguments in the literature in relation to the process of sublimation and the effect of a popularised political sphere where it is “exchange value, not truth value [that] counts” (Marcuse, 1964; p.57). The ramifications for depoliticising political coverage are discussed both in terms of the British legacy media and to a lesser extent, social media.

The term sublimation, as used by Marcuse (1964) is defined as the integration and transformation of high-culture concepts such as politics, into items with wider appeal. Marcuse argues that when high-culture concepts undergo this transformation they lose the inherent cultural values that originally set them apart. Sublimation is vital to the process of commodification according to Marcuse and it is by the devaluing of the source that lower levels of agency or disenfranchisement may be created. In the following quote, Marcuse focuses on the commodification of high culture and suggests that:

[The] liquidation of two-dimensional culture takes place not through the denial and rejection of the ‘cultural values’ but through the wholesale incorporation into the established order, through their reproduction on a massive scale (p. 57)

This process of liquidation can be applied to the realm of politics, where the political grandstanding in the run up to a general election is less about political ideology, but more about the personalities of those running (as seen in the 2016 US Presidential election as well as the 2016/17 Brexit referendum and subsequent negotiations).

Marcuse's (1964) ideas suggest that by creating a pseudo-gladiatorial combat between the electoral competitors, the political sphere is reduced to marketable "sound bites" and rating fodder. It is a spectacle designed along two axes; maintaining the political elite, and transforming political addresses from an aspect of civil service into a commodity that can be bought and sold as newspapers and television subscriptions. It can be argued that the re-appropriation of political ideology and "high culture" to the consumer realm is for the betterment of the electorate, However, by reducing this distance, both are robbed of their authenticity, value and potential to critique their spheres of influence. The process of sublimation is further demonstrated by Balmas (2013) in her work on fake news, and how political satire devalues aspects of political culture and political ideology. These politically focused programmes frame the political discussion with an emphasis on personality rather than policy. This emphasis has been shown to contribute to viewers perceptions of political candidates (Moy, Xenos & Hess, 2006) and can even be seen to affect constructs such as political trust (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Tsfati, Tuckachinsky & Peri, 2009).

As suggested by Marcuse (1964), the purpose of the sublimation process is to ensure that it is "exchange value, not truth value [that] counts" (p. 57). With this in mind, similar concerns are raised by Herman and Chomsky (1988) in relation to the increasingly centralised nature of Western agenda-setting media, which is supported by Murdock and Golding (1977). Murdock (1982) neatly contextualises this phenomenon in how the products produced by communications industries are:

goods and services like any others... But they are also something more. By providing accounts of the contemporary world and images of the 'good life', they play a pivotal role in shaping social consciousness, and it is this 'special relationship' between economic and cultural power that has made the issue of their control a continuing focus of academic and political concern (p. 118)

In Marcuse's (1964) *One Dimensional Man*, the increased concentration of Western agenda-setting media is argued to represent a method of protection, as it ensures control over a particular series of activities such as the production and dissemination of news content under a single authority. This concentration of agenda-setting media is not only highlighted by Marcuse (1964) but also by Herman and Chomsky (1988), among others. Bennett (1982) represents another researcher concerned with the increased concentration of the national press, and illustrates the process of sublimation in this context, by suggesting that the systems in which the mainstream media operate have a tendency to "inoculate [themselves] against subversion" (p. 30). The process of inoculation is achieved through strict control of the topics covered, and of any potential contradictions contained within. This

behaviour includes, but is not limited to, the exclusion of alternative political perspectives that compete with, or transcend existing social arrangements. They also can be seen to include the presentation of the discussion in a manner free from diverse interpretation, to ensure the perpetuation of the distributor's existence as a business as well as political status quo. Marcuse (1964) highlights the toxicity of this type of action, given that it closes "the universe of discourse" and tends to propagate a form of one dimensional consciousness in the readership or audience; alluding to the apathy highlighted by Henn, Weinstein and Forrest (2005) and others (Armstrong, 2005; Esser & de Vreese, 2007).

### *The rise and relevance of political consumerism*

The rise of political consumerism represents a contradiction to the assertion that political engagement is decreasing (López Pintor & Gratschew, 2002). Furthermore, it is ironic that the demographic often seen as responsible for the decrease in political engagement (those aged 18-25, Armstrong, 2005; Esser & de Vreese, 2007) is the most active in terms of individualised political action and political consumerism (Stolle, Micheletti & Berlin, 2011). Political consumerism itself has a long historical tradition according to Breen (2005), but has seen a resurgence since the 1970's (Dalton, 2006; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013). At present, there is limited research concerning the relationship between political consumerism, social media use and other forms of political participation, such as voting or party membership (Boulianne, 2009; Pasek, More & Romer, 2009). The following section contextualises the debate surrounding political consumerism, whether it constitutes a political act and whether it can promote greater engagement with constitutional politics. Regardless of its categorisation, significant mobilisation can be measured among young people when lifestyle politics are assessed (Stolle et al., 2011), indicating that the population is not as politically disinterested as suggested by some. One explanation for this mobilisation may be derived from an individual's perceptions of efficacy when engaging with these sorts of political acts (the importance of perceived efficacy when predicting agency is explored earlier in this chapter when addressing the work of Azjen, 1991; Bandura, 2001; Jeannerod, 2003).

The basic definition of political consumerism as provided by Micheletti (2003) concerns the "actions [of] people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices" (p. 2). It is important to note that these consumer

practices often appear in two forms – boycotts and buycotts – both of which have been mentioned earlier in the chapter. Micheletti and Stolle (2005) define boycotts and buycotts in the following way:

Citizens *boycott* to express political sentiment and they *buycott* or use labelling schemes to support corporations that represent values—environmentalism, fair trade, and sustainable development, for example—that they support. (p. 2)

The basic definition here is supported by both Copeland (2014) and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013), who advocate categorisation of political consumerism as a “political act” though one bearing more similarity civic engagement rather than “true” political participation.

The debate surrounding political consumerism hinges on the dichotomy of whether the political consumer activities are inherently “political” or whether it should be considered a solely “civic” act and the extent to which this is even relevant to a discussion of individual political agency. The debate stems from the types of behaviours associated with traditional forms of political engagement such as voting or party membership (Boulianne, 2009; Pasek et al., 2009) and their relationship with acts associated with political consumerism; boycotting and buycotting. The main concern here is that these political consumer acts structure any political debate in a hierarchical manner that drastically impedes involvement with the institutional political sphere (Jacobsen & Dolsrud, 2007; Marcuse, 1964). The re-appropriation of the government-electorate relationship to a consumer one, lends government a degree of unaccountability often associated with the market (Jacobsen & Dolsrud, 2007; Marcuse, 1964). However, much of the research exploring political consumerism has highlighted a lack of faith in the government to act on, or instigate policies deemed important to the electorate. This is cited as a driving factor behind the uptake of the civic/political consumer activities. Furthermore, the groups referred to in these studies often show greater trust in other citizens than elected officials (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle et al., 2005).

Clearly, there are a number of concerns regarding the continued downward trend of youth involvement with traditional forms of political engagement (Armstron, 2005; Boulianne, 2009; Pasek et al., 2009). These concerns are contradicted to some degree by the rise of a number of non-traditional political behaviours (in particular political consumerism associated with digital youth culture; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle et al., 2005). The relationship that young people have with political consumerism appears to differ significantly from that of older generations (Keeter, Zukin, Andolina & Jenkins, 2002; Sandovici & Davis, 2010). The difference illustrated here may be attributed

to a tendency of British youth to identify acts of political consumerism as opportunities for individualized political action, rather than as consumer actions in their own right. Alderman (1999) contextualises this duality in the following quote:

[the UK has] become two nations politically: on the one hand, that of two parties which continue to monopolize power at the parliamentary and governmental level and, on the other, that of the single issue groups and protest movements, whose membership has long since outstripped the active grassroots support the parties can call upon (p. 128)

The relationship between social media usage and political participation still requires further exploration particularly with regards to political consumerism, due to the complex interaction it has with conventional politics (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Pasek et al., 2009). The current work seeks to contribute to this exploration by firstly addressing how individuals use social media for political engagement, secondly assessing how frequently individuals use the platform and comparing that to legacy media formats and thirdly how these facilitate a discussion of individual agency in this context. The comparison along these axes is important considering the differences even among young people (Bakker & De Vreese, 2011; Courtois et al., 2009; Gustafsson, 2012; Ostman, 2012; van Duersen, 2010).

#### **2.4: Media diversity, social realities and culture transmission**

There is agreement in the literature that legacy media exert significant influence over the formation of public priorities, due to their position as primary agenda setters and gatekeepers (Cohen, 1963; Coleman, McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2009; Fuchs & Pfetsch, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). However, given the growing primacy of social media like Facebook and Twitter as news disseminators and aggregators, their tenure in this position has been called into question. The following section will firstly discuss the importance of media concentration and diversity. This will extend to an exploration of the processes by which various political and social realities are created. Secondly, the section will highlight a number of psychological theories associated with norm transmission which predict the expression of particular political norms (such as voting).

##### *Media concentration and diversity*

The national press is still considered by many commentators to be the primary agenda-setter for political topics (Cohen, 1963; Coleman, McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2009; Fuchs & Pfetsch, 1996;



McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). This section explores changes in the media landscape and the effect this may have on agenda-setting in the UK. These changes are important, as the advent of social media has facilitated the multiplicity of content creators required of the democratic participation model posited by McQuail (2002). These changes represent an opportunity for engagement, due to the diversity of coverage and the ability of users to personalise their own consumption (Crosbie, 2006).

Building from the traditional libertarian position advocated by Mill (1947), the role of the libertarian press (to which most western media organisations claim to subscribe to; Herman & Chomsky, 1988) is to facilitate the acquisition and dissemination of salient civic and political knowledge. In this process, the legacy media should also seek to facilitate lively debate by providing a variety of viewpoints (Fuchs, 2014; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Hochschild, 2010). The prevention of elite interference features heavily in both Fuch's (2014) Herman & Chomsky's (1988) work, where both emphasise a need to prevent the growing concentration of media ownership. This increased concentration is seen to be damaging as it limits the number of voices able to challenge the status quo, ensuring that large media organisations are able to capitalise on their position as agenda-setters by disseminating content that either raises their profit margin or provides them some measure of political sway. The accessibility of this debate is also vital, given the importance of perceived efficacy in predicting agency (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 2001).

It can be argued that the business practices employed by legacy media organisations fail to address the media concentration apparent in both the UK and United States (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). The high levels of concentration can be seen to impact the ability of these organisations to disseminate the news in the manner outlined above, due to the lack of diversity both in terms of story selection and perspective. Mill (1947) illustrates the importance of this diversity:

If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind. Were an opinion a personal possession of no value except to the owner; if to be obstructed in the enjoyment of it were simply a private injury, it would make some difference whether the injury was inflicted upon a few people or many. But the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of

exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error. (p. 16)

The concentration of legacy media contrasts significantly with the more diverse coverage online, given the variety of content creators and providers. With this in mind, it could be argued that it is the more diverse coverage of civic and political events online that is driving the popularity of social media, not only as a news aggregator, but also as an entertainment platform. Furthermore, the more affective reporting obtained from various content-creators (including those working for large news organisations) could also be seen to facilitate the lively debate so necessary to Mill (1947) as well as Herman and Chomsky (1988). The shift in reporting style by content creators is key in creating new movements popular amongst young people.

### *Creating social realities*

Arguably one of the primary reasons for the rise of political consumerism compared to the decline in constitutional engagement, is due to the construction of a social reality orientated towards the hierarchical consumer relationship (illustrated in *Section 2.3*), rather than traditional governance (Marcuse, 1964). This “consumer reality” is accompanied by a “[shift] from consumer rights to consumer duties” (Sassatelli, 2006, p. 236). The transition makes possible the opportunity to sell governmental programmes like “cornflakes” as suggested by Lord Young (Franklin, 2004). The nature of constructing these realities is fundamentally tied to agenda-setting itself and contributes to understanding feelings of empowerment, or disenfranchisement in British youth.

Supported by the work of Loftus and Palmer (1974) and Leets (2000), the work of Barthes (1974) and Foucault (1971) demonstrate the importance of discourse and power relationships in creating social and political realities. Leets (2000) specifically demonstrates how the deliberate removal of key aspects of information (utilising various devices such as priming or framing) can facilitate a particular understanding of an event, creating a specific social reality. Herman and Chomsky (1988) and Potter (1996) illustrate this point, firstly in relation to American involvement overseas in Cambodia and East Timor and secondly in historical cases of political and social rhetoric. With regards to the Cambodia and East Timor case, Herman and Chomsky (1988) demonstrate how the involvement of United States in Cambodia was emphasised in *The New York Times* in order to distract from the story of US support of an Indonesian invasion of East Timor. The difference in coverage is illustrated by a comparison of reporting between *The New York Times* and *The London Times*. Herman and

Chomsky found that the former noticeably redacted the Indonesian story when compared to *The London Times*. The idea of framing is illustrated here when considering the manipulation or removal of key aspects of the story in order to portray the United States as a positive force in the region. Using these techniques to influence power relations, the agenda-setting media is able to facilitate the re-appropriation of the market consumer hierarchy to the political sphere. This shift may go some way towards explaining the decline in youth political engagement, given that the core concept of politics or governmental policy can be seen to be diluted or transformed into entertainment, limiting engagement and efficacy.

#### *Methods of cultural transmission: Dissemination of social norms and practices*

In the discussion surrounding youth political socialisation and engagement, Amnå, Ekström, Kerr and Stattin (2009) highlight the importance of social norm transmission. By emphasising the importance of social institutions like schools and religious groups, as well as more localised feedback channels like friends and family, Amnå, Ekström, Kerr and Stattin reinforce the position established by Althusser (2014) regarding the replication of dominant ideologies. The following section builds on this position, addressing social norm transmission in terms of Latané's (1996) dynamic social impact theory, whilst touching on both terror management theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986) and Bandura's work on agency (2002). Terror management theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986) and Bandura's work (2001) both provide useful insight into how the transmission of social norms may impact political engagement.

As identified by Bandura (2001) and Jeannerod, (2003), sociostructural influences represent a large contributor to perceptions of agency. These sociostructural influences can be seen to be reflections of the culture and society in which they exist. Lehman, Chiu and Schaller's (2004) interpretation of the role of culture in facilitating or inhibiting agency is a reciprocal one in which:

Psychological processes influence culture. Culture influences psychological processes. Individual thoughts and actions influence cultural norms and practices as they evolve over time, and these cultural norms and practices influences the thoughts and actions of individuals. (p. 689)

When applying an evolutionary perspective (one that attempts to explain the genesis and development of particular observed behaviours) to culture creation, it is important to note that solitude is dangerous. By grouping together in supportive collectives, there is the potential for mutual benefit. These benefits focus primarily on survival and an increased chance of sexual reproduction.

The benefits outlined here represent the primary motivators behind the social contract outlined by Hobbes (2010) and Locke (1980) and it is by entering into these supportive collectives that the social contract is formed.

It can be argued that while contemporary society is beyond basic concerns of reproduction, the transmission of norms remains important. They can be seen to influence common beliefs, practices and expectations (Campbell, 1982) that help hold societies together; the social contract that both Hobbes (2010) and Locke (1980) speak of. These cultural norms or social contracts are not limited to physical practices and expectations, but can develop into complex abstract constructs, such as shared perceptions of morality (Krebs & Janicki, 2004; Pinker, 2002) or governance. Dynamic social impact theory can be used to describe social norm transmission within this context (Latané, 1996).

#### i. Dynamic social impact theory

Latané's (1996) dynamic social impact theory focuses on an evolutionary approach to culture creation, and is described at greater length in *Section 2.1*. Latané suggests early societies, made up of relatively few individuals working and living in close proximity, facilitated the development of more complex social structures through interaction and influence. Latané's work on cultural dissemination is particularly useful in the context of this thesis for two main reasons. Firstly, it can provide some explanation for how digital culture and norms are created online, mirroring the work of Burgess et al. (2006). Secondly, it can be used to explain the impact of the British legacy media on its readership and the electorate as a whole. These two reasons represent the main application of Latané's theory within this thesis, though the evolutionary component will be addressed briefly here.

While focusing on evolutionary explanations, dynamic social impact theory (Latané, 1996) is not restricted to a hypothetical past but deftly illustrates changes in contemporary society with only minor modifications. In early societies, proximity represented the primary transmission vector for cultural norms. However, through technological advancement, proximity has become less important, considering that we are able to transmit messages over greater distances and at greater speeds- firstly through post, then telephony and most recently the internet. This progressive increase in transmission speed facilitated the development of societies, states and countries with their own cultures and distinct social norms. In Latané's (1996) work, interpersonal communication is key when evaluating the transmission of social and cultural norms. When considering that the British legacy media is

classified as a form of mass communication, with a “reach” far beyond any singular individual, agenda-setting organisations are well positioned to facilitate the transmission of these norms in the manner advocated by Latané’s model.

It can be argued that there are strong ties between dynamic social impact theory and the process of agenda-setting. These links are epitomised by the former’s ability to contextualize social capital in relation to constitutional and non-constitutional engagement, through the creation of particular social realities (Barthes, 1974; Leets, 2000). The links between dynamic social impact theory and agenda-setting emphasise the importance of “influence” in Latané’s (1996) model. The advances in technology highlighted in the previous paragraph have negated the need for physical proximity in interpersonal communication. However, these shifts in technology do not address the role of influence in ensuring the uptake of a given norm. In this instance, the British legacy media and other agenda-setting formats are well situated to exert their influence. This is based on the notion that- as a platform- legacy media could be considered to have a large reach (pseudo-proximity) due to their distribution networks. Furthermore, based on the work of both Althusser (2014) and Herman and Chomsky (1988), they can also be considered to occupy a position of “expertise” by virtue of their ability to stay in business through the perceived value of their commentary. By comparison, social media could be argued to be a more direct representation of Latané’s (1996) theory in that the various platforms that make up social media constitute a digital representation of physical geography, where individuals are capable of influencing those they are linked to – gaining credibility based on previous post history, as demonstrated by Jenkins (2006).

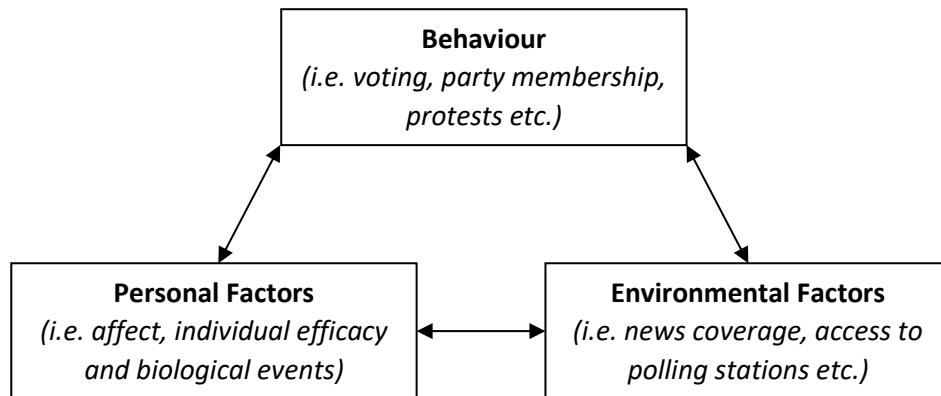
The perception of expertise provides legacy media organisations with a great deal of influence in terms of agenda-setting or norm transmission. This assessment is based upon their ability to emphasise a topic and the audience/public to consider that particular topic to be important (Scheufele, 2000; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). To this end, Latané’s (1996) dynamic social impact theory illustrates how a low readership platform may generate such a pronounced effect on norm transmission, due to the perceived expertise of writers and editors and the replication of this information by familial, friendship and other social groups (Althusser, 2014; Amnå, Ekström, Kerr & Stattin, 2009).

Tajfel and Turner's (1986) Social Identity Theory represents an alternative approach to norm transmission from that presented by Latané (1996) and focuses on how in-group and out-group bias impact the creation and adoption of social norms. Typically, socially desirable factors are attributed to the group to which a person belongs, improving their own self worth and developing a strong group identity. Similarly, this is true of groups to which the individual is not a member; however in this instance, less desirable connotations are associated with the out-group; once again reaffirming one's own self-esteem. Clearly, the situation presented in this thesis is not as simple as singular group membership, though identification with large scale groups such as being British or identifying as one of Britain's put-upon youth can be seen within subsequent data chapters. The complexity comes through multi-group membership which constructs a person's identity along many different angles, such as simultaneously identifying as a "young person" and as British. With regards to the creation and distribution of social norms in the context of the current work, the British legacy media along with other forms of agenda-setting media can be argued to challenge existing social identities in subtle ways. This is achieved through story selection and how they frame particular events or related groups, forcing minor changes to the social norms associated with these identities through exposure to these messages (Donson, Chesters, Welsh & Tickle; 2004). Considering the overlap between the work of Tajfel and Turner (1986) and Latané (1996) this thesis adopts the more holistic approach of the latter due to its ability to reconcile media influence with culture creation and transmission, consolidating works originating from divergent fields such as psychology (represented by the work of Amnå, Ekström, Kerr & Stattin, 2009) and political theory (represented by the work of Althusser, 2014) under one unified explanation.

## ii. Social cognitive theory of mass communication

Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory of mass communication can be used to contextualise the exhibited political behaviours emerging from the processes outlined by Latané's (1996) dynamic social impact theory and how they might link to a discussion of political agency. As outlined earlier in the chapter, Latané's (1996) dynamic social impact theory operates under two main assumptions. The first states that culture is a by-product of interpersonal interactions occurring within a dynamic system. The second assumption is that social influence techniques are intrinsically tied to any act of communication. These two assumptions can be mapped onto Bandura's (2001) model, as shown in *Figure 2.1*.

Figure 2.1 Social cognitive theory of mass communication model



Firstly, the emergent properties associated with culture generation (in this case political culture generation) are tied to the interaction across all three nodes identified in Bandura's model. The second assumption of Latané's (1996) work is more important, as it can be used to illustrate how the media can have such a pronounced effect on the various personal factors that influence behaviour by using social influence techniques, as outlined in the previous section. However, Bandura's (2001) model allows for individuals to be more proactive, limiting the undesirable environmental factors by simply avoiding certain news distributors, or engaging in fact-checking techniques. The emphasis on agency here is important as it transcends the common notion that media content is inflicted upon an audience and replicated elsewhere by familial, friendship and other social groups as suggested by both Althusser (2014) and Amnå et al. (2009). However, the types of influence highlighted by both Althusser (2014) and Amnå et al. (2009) can also be accounted for by the model and play an integral role in dynamic social impact theory more broadly. By illustrating the interlinked nature of the constituent nodes within the model, Bandura (2001) demonstrates how individuals may determine their use of these sources differently and engage politically how they see fit (Harrison, Newholm & Shaw, 2005; Sørensen, 2004).

Using Latané's (1996) model as a basis, the cultural impact of norm transmission can be seen to influence a number of societal structures and individual behaviours as indicated by Bandura's social cognitive theory of mass communication (2001). By advocating the necessity of traditional political behaviours such as voting (Boulianne, 2009; Pasek et al., 2009) there is the potential to create an attributional bias towards the behaviour (voting), divorced from a sincere engagement with the topic (Bandura, 1986). However, the growing lack of trust in politicians has itself generated an agency based around empowered, socially conscious consumption and social obligation. These tendencies represent the foundation for consumer movements and non-constitutional engagement, as illustrated by

Atkinson (2012). By clarifying the relationship between culture creation, transmission and uptake, it is possible to advocate a potential change in the nature of “political” engagement, based on salient cultural cues (Copeland, 2014). Shared social values can be seen to impact individual agency by way of attitudinal and affective components as demonstrated by Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory of mass communication, which utilizes these internal factors to predict exhibited behaviour. These same attitudinal and affective components can be seen in more niche concepts such as terror management theory (Greenberg, Pyszynski & Solomon, 1986) which seeks to quantify the effect of culture on individual agency and exhibited behaviours.

### iii. Terror management theory

Terror management theory (Becker, 1973; Greenberg et al., 1986) represents a method by which particular social norms are primed in order to foster particular behaviours. It illustrates how perceptions of individual agency can be manipulated by placing emphasis on news stories associated with intergroup aggression and mortality. Parallels can be drawn between the methods illustrated in Greenberg et al.’s (1986) terror management theory and Soroka’s (2014) work on the impact of negativity in politics with both arguing that negative stories capture an audience’s attention whilst encouraging journalists to emphasise these stories due to the increased uptake.

Terror management theory suggests that we as humans are unique when compared to other animals, due to our ability to engage in conscious thought; unfortunately, this increased awareness is accompanied by the knowledge of our own mortality. Greenberg et al. (1986) argue that the anxiety that arises from this awareness conflicts with each person’s “innate” will to survive; creating extreme cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1964). At this point it could be argued that this awareness and resulting dissonance promotes the interest in negative news stories alluded to by Soroka (2014). Soroka’s work highlights an interesting interaction between media coverage of particular events and the resulting perception of those events. Predominantly focusing on negative news, Soroka suggests that evaluations of a given event are more positive when the audience is currently experiencing the event from an adverse position- he references the overemphasis of crime in the media and the perception of threat held by those in the affected areas.

Terror management theory (Becker, 1973; Greenberg et al., 1986) posits that the cognitive dissonance felt by the individual is resolved through the development of a number of social constructs,



known as the cultural worldview. The cultural worldview takes the form of religions, governments and laws which place value in human life (Greenberg et al., 1992) and often result in a reduction in freedom in order to ensure that this preservation of life is maintained (similar to the social contract, Hobbes, 2010; Locke, 1980). The act of upholding the standards contained within a cultural worldview promotes a sense of high self-esteem within an individual, reducing death anxiety (Rosenblatt et al., 1989). The importance of this increased self-esteem is apparent in Bandura's (2001) work, given that it is capable of predicting agency. The death anxiety illustrated in Terror management theory is further reduced by promises of immortality, either real (for example reincarnation, offered by religion) or symbolic (the preservation of the self through some sort of legacy, for example written works; Greenberg et al., 1986) and can be linked to a strong group identity, such as being British. When combined, these three facets make up the cultural anxiety buffer (Yalom, 1980; Zilboorg, 1943). The reason for emphasising the role of death anxiety is more apparent when considering the focus of modern news coverage, and the potential impact this may have on cultural world view, perceptions of control and ultimately individual agency. Soroka (2014) tempers any potential fears of a spiral of negativity by suggesting that negativity bias (be it economic/political sentiment or simply safety concerns) is less pronounced in adverse situations. Soroka uses an economic example in his work to demonstrate this point. He argues that when levels of unemployment are low, any increase in unemployment directly impacts how individuals perceive the success of the economy (likely negatively). However, when unemployment is high, a similar rise in unemployment does not seem to elicit the same effect on economic sentiment. He does go on to suggest that positive coverage in these adverse situations does have a more pronounced impact than the negative, perhaps illustrating an underlying mechanism of Rosenblatt et al.'s (1989) cultural worldview defence.

Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs (2001) among others (Balmas, 2013; Levy & Rickard, 1982; Soroka, 2014), suggest that stories emphasising mortality and intergroup aggression epitomise legacy media coverage, considering that "bad is stronger than good" when it comes to news. In this instance, terror management theory (Greenberg et al., 1986) can be seen to be successful in explaining the appearance of ideological and intergroup aggression. However, there are two main flaws that have been highlighted by alternative approaches which limit the success of the theory. Firstly, there are some inconsistencies in the evolutionary component (Hamilton, 1964; Williams, 1966), in which mortality salience is overemphasised as the only trigger for worldview defence. Secondly, it has been suggested by Leontiev (1981; 1984) that individuals themselves are the largest contributing factor to intergroup behaviours such as ideological aggression, rather than worldview defence. However, there is some evidence to suggest that stories facilitating existential concerns such

as terrorism or immigration (based on perceived loss of jobs) can elicit mobilisation and political cohesion (Huddy, 2015).

## **2.5: Assessing the emancipatory potential of social media**

The study of social media is still relatively new, yet the impact of social media platforms has been demonstrated on numerous occasions. The most pertinent example is perhaps the Egyptian revolution in 2013, where social media played a significant role in both the coverage of the event (in situations where national press did not) and in its organisation, through coordinating activist groups online (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliviera, 2012). Similar trends were also seen within the United Kingdom during the London Riots and subsequent clean up (Fuchs, 2012), where again Twitter was used to cover the event and coordinate those involved. The following section illustrates how the broader literature assesses the potential of social media in fostering greater political engagement in British youth. It also considers examples, such the recent uprisings in the Arab Spring and the role the platform played in these events.

### *Impacts of social media*

The link between political consumerism and engagement with social media has already been addressed earlier in the chapter and has suggested that young people are not as apathetic as some claim in the literature and in public discussions. Instead young people are arguably choosing to engage in individualised political acts directed at the market rather than the state (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle et al., 2005). The following section seeks to illustrate how social media platforms may facilitate this process by addressing the differences between legacy media and social media, in terms of proximity to accredited sources as well as interactivity (Crosbie, 2006; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochschild, 2010).

As illustrated by Delli Carpini & Keeter, (1996), Crosbie, (2006) and Hochschild, (2010), the internet has significant potential to furnish the electorate with politically salient information and has been shown to do so in numerous instances in both Western Europe and the United States (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Xenos & Moy, 2007). However, the extent to which this encourages a transition to electoral participation is called into question, given that just over 66% of the British population took part in the 2015 General Election (compared to 78% in 1992; UK Political Info., n.d.). This trend was

echoed by each of the constituent countries that make up the United Kingdom. However, the 69% turnout rate of the most recent 2017 General Election (a 3% increase over the previous election) represents a potential shift in engagement, though it is perhaps too soon to say.

Within the debate surrounding electoral participation, there are those who suggest that the electoral format may also affect turnout (Schuck & de Vreese, 2011). The 2014 Scottish Referendum reported an approximate turnout of 85% (Electoral Commission, 2014); notably higher than the British General Election. Schuck and de Vreese (2011) attribute the increased turnout to the nature of referendums, which have been seen to frequently generate higher voter turnouts when compared to General Elections. That being said, there have been instances in which digital formats have seen great success in terms of participation in Asia (e.g. through demonstrations and social movements); notably Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Taiwan (Lin, Cheong, Kim & Jung, 2010; Woo-Young, 2005), though these e-participation models often mirror referendums in their application. The positive findings of these studies should not be neglected, but the findings should be tempered with caution. When citing these instances, it is important to account for individual differences in social media usage (Courtois et al., 2009; Turkle, 2011), particularly in situations where the prevailing culture is not readily comparable.

Outside of electoral or voting formats, Burgess et al. (2006) and Kenski and Stroud, (2006) attribute the success of digital mobilisation to the strengthening of social relationships online. The creation of a community, based around shared interests (Burgess et al., 2006; Kenski & Stroud, 2006) can be argued to be one of the prime motivators behind political consumer behaviours. However, there are some who believe that the increasing reliance on social media to mediate existing relationships may cause individuals to abandon their existing social environment (Nie & Erbring, 2000). However, these concerns are not representative of the field as a whole (Anderson, 2003; Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Holmes, 1999; Wellman & Hampton, 1999). Turkle (2011) in this instance is particularly helpful, in that she highlights that social media platforms are capable of both behavioural outcomes; simultaneously widening the social gap, whilst forming and strengthening relationships online. She warns of an overly digitally mediated lifestyle and a need for additional research on the effects of social media on socialisation.

Extending from the discussion surrounding socialisation online, Bimber (2003) and Xenos and Moy (2007) present two approaches that can be used to explore the production and consumption of political news online and the affect these have on agency. The first approach, advocated by Xenos and Moy, builds on the earlier work of Downs (1957), emphasising how the cost (in this instance referring to expended effort) and availability of a wide variety of information may impact political engagement. The second approach – advocated by Bimber (2003) – parallels the work of Turkle (2011), Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013) and Castells et al. (2009), highlighting the interactions between the technology itself and user characteristics. DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, and Robinson (2001) illustrate this second approach by emphasising how “web-based human interaction really does have unique and politically significant properties” (p. 319). DiMaggio et al. (2001) focus on social media platforms impact on socialisation at its simplest level, emphasising their potential to generate new forms of political socialisation, driven by the users themselves, in much the same manner as suggested by Youniss et al. (2002), where:

“political socialisation is not something that adults do to adolescents, it is something that youth do for themselves” (p. 133).

At a very basic level there are two points of view; those optimistic for a new political forum and those pessimistic, believing that social media will contribute more to the existing “apathy”. Optimists focus on the potential to facilitate democracy in a number of ways, either through providing more nuanced coverage of political events, or by fostering the creation of a politically mobilized community online (Castells et al., 2009; Rheingold, 2000; Stolle et al., 2005). On the other hand, pessimists adopt a wariness of social media and those who would place too much stock in its potential. Pessimists often cite the rise of television as a cautionary tale, warning that it would not lead to any major changes (Groombridge, 1972) and may in fact harm social life due to the changes in the manner of socialisation (Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Sunstein, 2005; Turkle, 2011).

### *Social media and political engagement*

As identified in the previous section, social media possess a number of characteristics that have the potential to facilitate agency. However, the same benefits were attributed to television shortly after its conception. Groombridge (1972) illustrates the attributed potential of television as follows:

[television could be] considered as a candidate for a major part in the civilising of our arid communal existence and in the improvement and enlivenment of our democracy, such that more people have the opportunity, the aptitude, the incentive and the desire to play an active personal part in what is with unconscious irony called ‘public life’ (p. 25)

With this in mind, it is important to assess the extent to which social media can facilitate traditional conceptions of political engagement, or whether social media platforms are better suited to more individualised non-constitutional forms of engagement, as demonstrated by Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013) and Stolle et al. (2011).

Beginning with the non-constitutional political behaviours, social media have numerous and varied roles ranging from disseminating petitions to facilitating boy/buycotts (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle et al., 2011) in addition to promoting militant actions, such as protests or demonstrations (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). Papacharissi (2010) and Howard (2011) emphasise the role of blogs and microblogs (such as Twitter) as news disseminators when legacy news media are restricted or blocked. Their importance is apparent even in situations where this is not the case, due to the instantaneity and personal nature of reporting on the platforms (Farhi, 2009; Grusin, 2010; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliviera, 2012). Furthermore, social media can often be seen at the core of youth involvement, due to their popularity among this demographic and their role in facilitating individual agency and offline collective action (Fuchs, 2012; Stolle et al. 2005; Ward & de Vreese, 2011).

Both Baek (2010) and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013) illustrate that those who are engaged in political consumer activities and other forms of civic engagement demonstrate a greater predisposition towards conventional politics overall. Mycock and Tonge (2012) suggest that the disenfranchisement associated with young people is more likely to be directed at the political elite and current political system, rather than at politics itself, at least in the case of the United Kingdom. There are certainly those who suggest the British legacy media contribute significantly to public cynicism and maintenance of the current political elite through their coverage, upholding relatively high levels of apathy (Armstrong, 2005; Balmas, 2012; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Levy & Rickard, 1982). Milbrath (1965) highlights the importance of:

[continuing the] moral admonishment for citizens to become active in politics, not because we want or expect great masses of them to become active, but rather because the admonishment helps keep the system open and sustains the belief in the right of all to participate, which is an important norm governing the behaviour of political elites. (p. 162)

Therefore, it could be assumed that, despite the enabling environment within the UK (based on the Enabling Environment Index provided by CIVICUS, 2013) and the predisposition of British youth

towards politics, much of their socio-political attitudes are skewed by the existing legacy media and reinforced by social institutions such as schools, religious groups as well as through family and friends (Althusser, 2014; Amnå, Ekström, Kerr & Stattin, 2009; Marcuse, 1964).

Turkle (2011) and Holmes (1999) emphasise the importance of these methods of socialisation in the generation and exhibition of social norms. Both suggest that social media use is fundamentally changing socialisation practices. This change may foster a divergent discourse that sidesteps the ideological assumptions of the British legacy media and allows young people to regain some measure of control of the political sphere (Freire, 1970; Redden, 2001). This is particularly relevant, given Strømsnes' (2009) assertion that youth can be at the forefront of dissident, non-constitutional forms of engagement (McIntyre, 2012). At present, this may be wishful thinking, but the potential for constitutional mobilization is there, as demonstrated by the 2014 Scottish Referendum and the London Riot cleanup in 2011 (Fuchs, 2012). Clearly, the social media platform is still young and may ultimately suffer the same fate as television (Groombridge, 1972). However, the potential of the format to facilitate agency cannot be denied, especially when there are those within the literature who have noticed a shift in the way young people engage politically and the role social media have played in that shift. The current work develops this line of thought by applying both quantitative and qualitative techniques, in order to challenge the dominant belief that British young people - like so many others in Western Europe and the United States - are disaffected and apathetic when it comes to politics.

## **2.6: Reconciling the literature with researcher positionality**

The literature relating to young people's political engagement in the United Kingdom is divided and can be categorised under two positions. The first of these mirrors Henn, Weinstein and Forrest's (2005) assertion that British youth is apathetic and politically disinterested, which is supported by the empirical findings of the Office for National Statistics (2012), the Hansard Society audit (2012) as well as those of López Pintor and Gratschew (2002). However, there is significant under-reporting of non-constitutional forms of engagement, leading to the second assessment. The alternative position suggests British youth are politically motivated, though choose to engage in the politics surrounding lifestyle choices through political consumer acts (Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2014;

Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle et al., 2005; 2011; Strømsnes, 2009) or through more disruptive forms such as protests and demonstrations (Fuchs, 2012; Howard, 2011; Papacharissi, 2010). Within the literature, the exact roles of the British legacy media and social media in facilitating these two assessments are still unclear, though the interactive and popular nature of social media could provide some support for the latter assessment (Farhi, 2009; Grusin, 2010; McQuail, 2002). Given the diversity of positions identified within this chapter regarding youth engagement with both media and the political sphere, the researcher has adopted a person-centred approach that prioritises individual agency. This approach is adopted both in research design (refer to *Chapter 3*) and in the analysis of *Chapters 5-7*. To conclude, this thesis seeks to explore the role of both the British legacy media and social media in their management and coverage of politics, as well as British youth's engagement with the political sphere.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The following chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this thesis. *Section 3.1* provides an overview of the methodology and its epistemological underpinnings, before elaborating on the research process and framework. The section concludes with an outline of the research questions and the benefits associated with the three-tiered design as outlined in *Chapter 1*. *Section 3.2* covers the approach associated with the initial methodological tier, providing justification for the employed computer-mediated approach in the form of reference to an earlier pilot study recorded in *Appendix 1*. The aim of this pilot study was to ensure that the results obtained from the methods were viable for the analysis required in answering the research questions, as well as confirming that the computer-mediated approach was the most appropriate method for collecting and comparing the collected data. Aside from assessing the suitability of the methods, *Section 3.2* outlines four cases that are of particular significance to the thesis overall. These cases are the 2014 Scottish Referendum, the 2015 British General Election, Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 and the Anti-Fracking campaign 2014/15. These case studies are addressed systematically, highlighting why they were selected and linking them to the research questions and the methodological chapters they appear most frequently in. *Section 3.3* provides background and justification for the application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in the second methodological tier. The section covers the philosophical underpinnings of the approach as well as potential alternatives. *Section 3.4* details the final methodological tier; that of the quantitative questionnaire. This section breaks down the constituent measures contained within the questionnaire, justifying their selection and suitability. Overall, *Sections 3.2-3.4* address the underlying assumptions of each method, as well as how they relate to the preceding tiers.

### 3.1: A three-tiered design: Methodological overview

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, this thesis addresses each of the key research questions with the intention of examining the impact of legacy and social media on young people's political engagement and the associated attitudes, feelings and beliefs. The research questions are addressed using three methodological tiers, each building upon the last and contributing to the exploration of media impact. The first tier constituted a computer-mediated content analysis designed to assess contemporary coverage of political events by way of a comparison between social and legacy media. The second tier focused on a series of semi-structured interviews that utilise Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) with the aim of



exploring how individuals make sense of their own involvement in politics, as well as how they engage with various media platforms. The final tier involved the distribution of a structured questionnaire built around a series of standardised measures. The measures are essential to the discussing the questions posed by this thesis as they provide quantitative support for the qualitative assessments made in earlier tiers. The combination of these methods represents a novel approach to discussing youth political engagement and agency, that emphasises *a priori* predictions, context and subjective understanding.

The initial methodological tier focused on the exploration and analysis of four case studies encompassing a variety of constitutional and non-constitutional political events (the British General Election 2015, the Scottish Referendum 2014, Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 and the Anti-Fracking campaign 2014/15). These case studies were sourced between 2014 and 2015. Beginning with a narrative exploration of the four cases in *Chapter 4*, using coding sheets and descriptive statistics, the chapter illustrates how the British legacy media covered the sampled events with the aim of providing context for the subsequent data chapters. *Chapter 5* focuses on a direct comparison of social and legacy media coverage of only two of the initial four cases (the British General Election and Occupy: Parliament Square), employing a method of computer-mediated analysis outlined by Lewis, Zamith and Hermida (2013). The approach emphasises how computer-mediated methods can be used to firstly reduce the workload when dealing with large data sets (like those obtained from digital sources like Twitter) and secondly allow for greater time to be allocated to the comparative aspect of the analysis (due to the reduced workload). Furthermore, the methods themselves are also incredibly flexible, in that the same techniques can and are applied to both the sampled news articles and to Twitter. The application of this mixed-methods approach has been done in order to strengthen the constituent components of the included methods according to the work of Schrøder (2012). This was done with the aim of adding greater nuance and generalisability to those methods typically lacking in one of these areas.

The second methodological tier consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews, conducted using IPA (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The aim of these interviews was to broadly identify the individual attitudes and feelings of those sampled towards social media as a whole, in addition to the extent they feel involved with the political process. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for branching lines of questioning that deviated from the outlined interview schedule. The benefit of such an approach is based on the ability to explore related areas that are not predicted in

the initial construction of the interview schedule (with the intent to provide additional nuance when answering the outlined research questions). The emphasis on narrative and interpretations of individual subjective experience as provided by IPA represents a novel approach when assessing youth engagement with the political and media spheres. Rather than focusing on particular metrics related to constitutional (voting) and non-constitutional (protests and rallies) aspects of political engagement as Armstrong (2005), Hobolt (2009) and Scarrow (2001) have done, it focuses on the series of events and experiences that have shaped each individual participant's understanding of the political sphere and their role within it. These individual testimonies emphasise the personal way in which each participant engages with the political sphere, defining "what the experience for **this** person is like, what sense **this** particular person is making of what it is happening to them" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; pp. 3). It is in the context of these temporally salient experiences that individuals make sense of their own agency and relative position in society. It is pertinent to note that the findings obtained here are intended to provide narrative depth when addressing the research questions outlined in *Section 1.2* and as such do not attempt to generalise the findings to British youth more widely; it is for this reason that the final methodological tier was employed.

The final methodological tier employed a quantitative questionnaire, designed to elaborate upon the findings of both the computer-mediated content analysis and the semi-structured interviews. The results of *Chapter 7* provide some measure of context and generalisability to the more subjective results of the earlier methodological tiers employed in *Chapters 5* and *6*. The questionnaire contained a series of standardised measures which included political efficacy, self-efficacy, self-esteem and governmental trust (Acock, Clarke & Stewart, 1985; Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna & Mebane 2009; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2000; Rosenberg, 1979; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). This was in addition to a series of base metrics such as age, gender and some miscellaneous measures focused on usage and satisfaction derived from the Hansard Society audit (2012). The justification for each of these measures is explored in *Section 3.4*, along with any modifications made to the measures.

Those sampled as part of this thesis were drawn from British Nationals aged 18-25 in order to ensure the saliency of all statements relating to British politics and news stories. A similar emphasis on British coverage is applied to the cases and sourced newspapers in the first methodological tier. However, it is acknowledged that samples derived from Twitter cannot be screened for region or country and as such, it cannot be assumed that the entire sample is British in origin. That being said,

it remains representative of the discussions present on the platform when considering that the sample is drawn from key users and hashtags within the coverage, enhancing ecological validity and mitigating the necessity of a solely British sample.

The methodological pluralism employed within this thesis represents an extension of the work of Schrøder (2012). In his work, Schrøder advocates a blending of quantitative and qualitative methodologies in order to make analytical generalisations by way of “applying them one after the other in a sequential manner” (p. 798). The sequential application of methods facilitates an integrated approach which “synthesizes the two approaches into one empirical design” (p. 798). By employing the three-tiered mixed-methods design in this way, it ensures that all assumptions and analysis undertaken as part of this thesis are based on *a priori* predictions or the findings of the preceding tier. This ensures that the overall results are grounded in the empirical and experiential understanding of the fields in question. Furthermore, this process ensures that the work is based on well-founded research practices. The synthesis implied in the three-tiered design extends to the three main research questions (outlined in *Section 1.2* and repeated below), in that by answering one of the questions, greater understanding of the remaining two is achieved.

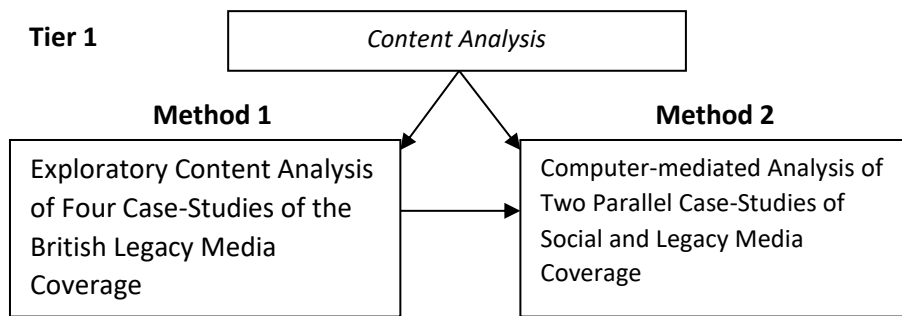
*RQ1: How do legacy and social media differ in their coverage of political events?*

*RQ2: How is the use of legacy and social media linked to political engagement in the lived experience of media users?*

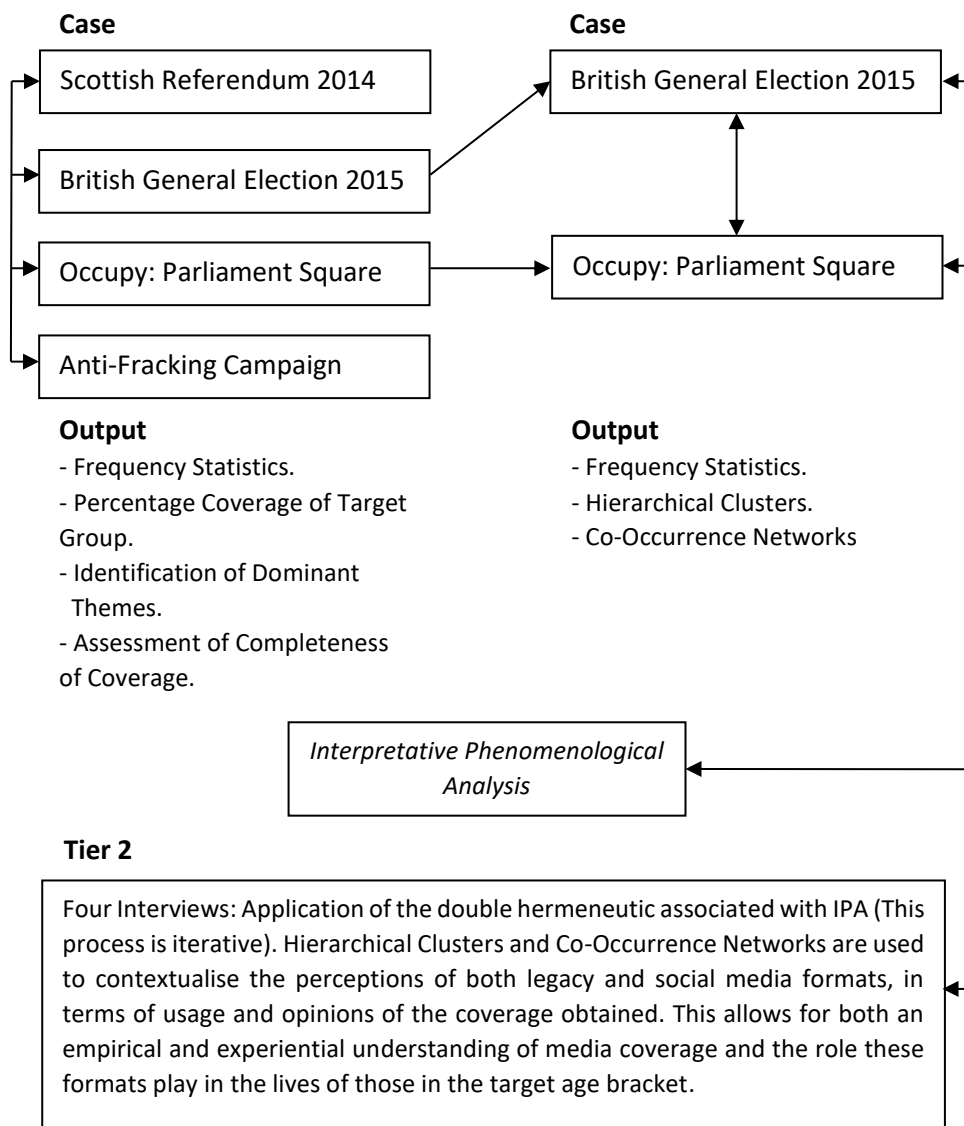
*RQ3: Is there a measurable association between legacy and social media use, political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem among young people?*

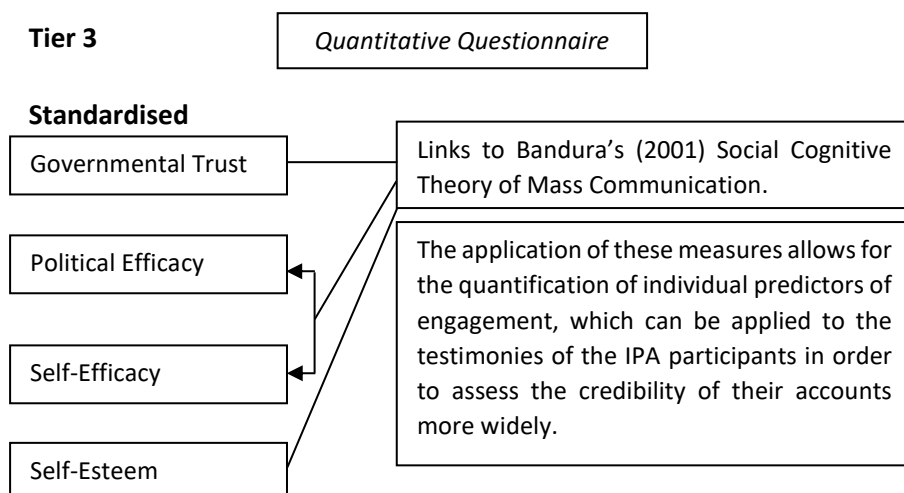
The mixed-methods approach is illustrated in *Figure 3.1*, which highlights how the constituent methods contribute to answering the three research questions, as well as demonstrating how the quantitative and qualitative methods are synthesised across the design. The following sections highlight the traditional shortfalls of each of the constituent approaches and how the use of mixed-methods can be seen to reduce the weaknesses of each individual approach, whilst facilitating both depth and breadth across the findings. The remainder of this chapter demonstrates how through integration of these methods, interpretative opacity can be reduced; particularly in the case of the second methodological tier.

Figure 3.1: Methodological structure



The findings of Method 1 provide context for the analysis of all subsequent methods within the thesis. Furthermore, the initial exploration represented in Method 1 allows for clusters to be identified more easily in Method 2, due to an awareness of the broad narratives present in the legacy media coverage.





The choice of standardised measures ensures direct mapping onto Bandura's (2001) model allowing for an agentic understanding of engagement. These measures are supported by a number of miscellaneous measures derived from the Hansard Society audit (2012) directing the focus towards media perception. These audit measures tie directly to the composition and coverage aspects that represent the focus of the Preliminary Content Analysis.

### 3.2: Laying the groundwork: An exploratory and computer-mediated content analysis

The first stage of this tiered design consisted of a detailed content analysis of both news and social media relating to four case studies. This was conducted using two approaches, a preliminary exploration of legacy media coverage of all four cases, discussed in *Chapter 4* and a parallel exploration of two of those cases using computer-mediated analysis in *Chapter 5*. The preliminary exploration of legacy media coverage focused on a quantitative evaluation of the coverage of four cases derived from British legacy media between 2014 and 2015. This evaluation used a series of bespoke coding sheets and the wider literature to facilitate a strong narrative understanding of the highlighted cases. With this in mind, *Chapter 4* provides context not only for computer-mediated analysis in *Chapter 5*, but for the subsequent interviews and questionnaires contained in *Chapters 6* and *7*.

The computer-mediated approach of *Chapter 5* employed the approach outlined by Lewis, Zamith and Hermida (2013) and builds on the narrative established in *Chapter 4*. This narrative is used here to facilitate an exploration of the coverage obtained from the legacy media and Twitter, by providing context relating to the topics covered in the four original case studies. These topics centre

on constitutional and non-constitutional forms of political engagement, notably the British General Election 2015 and Occupy: Parliament Square 2014. The findings of this comparison provide contextual grounding for the later stages, as well as narrative depth when interpreting the results of later methodological tiers.

There are two main reasons for focusing on newspapers rather than other legacy media in this analysis. Firstly, there is still the perception within academia and media reporting that broadsheet newspapers such as the *The Guardian* and *The Times* represent primary agenda-setters (Fuchs & Pfetsch, 1996; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Secondly, the topics covered by these organisations are seen to be integral to formulating public priorities (Cohen, 1963; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The case studies were selected in such a way as to cover the three broad areas of political engagement highlighted in the literature review (constitutional engagement, political consumerism and non-constitutional engagement).

The remainder of *Section 3.2* details the methods undertaken in the first methodological tier. It firstly addresses the approach taken in *Chapter 4*, before moving on to the computer-mediated analysis that makes up *Chapter 5*. The preliminary exploration undertaken in *Chapter 4* covers the four identified cases (2015 General Election, Occupy: Parliament Square 2014, The Scottish Referendum 2014 and the Anti-Fracking campaign 2014-15), the assessment of which was achieved through the coding of 130 news articles (approximately 40 articles per case) obtained from several British broadsheets via LexisNexis (an online archive for various publications). The coding sheets deconstructed the legacy media coverage focusing on key themes; power relationships and reference to British youth (see *Appendix 2*). Contemporary research supports the use of coding sheets in this manner- most notably the work of Rohde (2018) and Schwalbe, Keith and Silcock (2018). Rohde (2018) makes use of gridded coding sheets designed to quantify the appearance of a range of themes and concepts related to the Rio Olympic games in 2016. Rohde made use a bottom up approach to develop eleven main content categories when designing the coding sheets prior to undertaking his fixed examination period of 127 days. Rohde's analysis focused on drawing comparisons between local and international high quality print media on the identified content categories, some of which included the discourse around the hosts, the venue and the manifestation of the Olympic ideals. The purpose of this analysis was to illustrate the media presentation of the event and highlight any discrepancies between the local and international print media. This is not dissimilar from the intended purpose of *Chapter 4*, which instead of looking to compare international and local media seeks to highlight

differences in the coverage of the three forms of political engagement outlined in *Section 3.2*. As such, the methods employed are both contemporary and a viable method for exploring media coverage of a given event. Building from Rohde's more practical approach to exploring the legacy media presentation of an event, Schwalbe, Keith and Silcock (2018) provide the theory to support such an endeavour. In their work they demonstrate how coding sheets might be applied to a variety of media formats and how one might interpret the output of such coding practices. Since completing my research, similar methods have been deployed lending credibility to the analysis undertaken in *Chapter 4* (in addition to supporting the design and execution of the coding sheets found in *Appendix 2*).

The preliminary exploration of these four cases was followed by a computer-mediated analysis of two of the original four. This computer-mediated comparison focused on constitutional and non-constitutional engagement (the 2015 General Election and Occupy: Parliament Square, respectively). By utilising the work of Lewis, Zamith and Hermida (2013) (which has been validated within this context given its application in assessing Twitter's involvement in the Arab Spring; Howard, 2012; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012), a framework is provided for any attempt at comparing social media platforms such as Twitter and the legacy media. Lewis, Zamith and Hermida's (2013) method not only allows the researcher to efficiently translate the large amounts of data associated with Twitter-based analysis into a more manageable sample that can be assessed manually (Manovich, 2012) but posits that:

As a newswire, Twitter provides a constantly updated public source of raw material in near real-time. As a newsroom, it offers a collaborative public space for the processing of information through the application of journalistic techniques such as evaluating reports, verifying facts and highlighting the most relevant information. (Lewis, Zamith & Hermida, 2013; pp. 40)

This unique perspective on how journalists use social media can be used to justify the use of similar computer-mediated techniques to assess broad themes and topics within the sampled Tweets and legacy media texts, before employing more traditional manual techniques in order to gain nuance and detail missed in the computer-mediated component. The tools utilized by Lewis, Zamith and Hermida (2013) are not fully identified within their own work, but can be extrapolated from similar studies (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012) employing similar methods. These tools are applied in two distinct stages; this is done to firstly reduce the size of the data set and secondly to facilitate manual analysis. By employing this mixed-methods approach, a more comprehensive exploration of

the target case studies can be achieved, ensuring that the most salient aspects of both social and legacy media coverage are identified.

#### *Pilot study and assessment of method suitability*

The pilot study was employed to assess the suitability of the computer-mediated content analysis. The findings of the study (which explored the coverage of the European Election, 2014, See *Appendix 1*) broadly support the assertion that social media platforms such as Twitter are more diverse in their coverage and facilitatory towards overall political engagement when compared to the British legacy media. The results also support the findings of Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliviera (2012) relating to the role of key content creators online, which suggest that they are facilitators of debate, rather than leaders (as shown by the dominance of the “@Europarl\_EN” user in the online coverage of the European Election). Furthermore, it can be seen that the legacy media rely more heavily on personality than policy when compared to Twitter, though how personality is emphasised differs on each platform.

The virtue of the computer-mediated method is its ability to expedite the analysis of large volumes of data, particularly in the case of Twitter. Furthermore, the mediated nature of the analysis can also be applied to the legacy media samples, ensuring comparison across platforms. However, there are three main limitations that can be applied to this method as a whole. The first of these concerns the depth of manual content analysis that can be feasibly conducted on the Twitter sources. The approach utilised here draws upon computer-mediated methods to restrict the sample to key tweets which are then used to inform the analysis. This is by no means comprehensive, though it adds context to much of the findings. However, the reduced sample is less of a concern when dealing with the British legacy media, given the length of prose and the fewer unique sources. The discrepancy between platforms is largely accounted for in the method by utilising the same techniques across both samples (Lewis, Zamith & Hermida, 2013). The second limitation applies exclusively to the Twitter sources. Twitter is not region locked and as such, not all Tweets can be assumed to originate from British users or news aggregators. The failure to account for this is mitigated by the ecological strength of the sample, but is worthy of consideration when conducting the analysis or evaluating the findings. The final concern related to the prevalence of URL’s and other “noise” within the generated co-occurrence networks. While this was not a problem for the pilot study given that finding these “issues” was its intended purpose, steps have been taken to remove these instances from the final analysis.



This was achieved through more stringent use of stop words and inclusion/exclusion criteria. In conclusion, the computer-mediated approach employed in the pilot study represents a rigorous and novel approach to assessing news dissemination across multiple platforms.

The content analysis was designed to focus on answering *RQ1* and *RQ2*. By conducting the analysis in two distinct stages, an initial typological map was formed around the coverage of the events in question (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2010; Schrøder, 2012) before expanding to a more directed comparison. The approach undertaken in the first methodological tier used a combination of quantitative assessments based on metrics and secondary evaluations based on how these metrics reflected the coverage overall. This secondary evaluation is a form of qualitative generalisation, which-when taken in isolation- may elicit some degree of scepticism regarding the reliability and representation of the underlying social reality. However, because this qualitative assessment was based on the systematic quantitative coding of the sampled articles, the method goes some way to mitigating the concerns of reliability and representation (Schrøder, 2012). Conducting the analysis in this manner allowed for the retention of the tactile nature of researcher-driven content analysis whilst maintaining the scientific rigour needed to retain the reliability and representativeness of the initial stage.

These case studies were designed to give an overview of the coverage relating to constitutional, non-constitutional and political consumer forms of engagement. Furthermore, by including content analysis at this initial methodological tier, existing literature can be built into the predictions that inform the construction of later tiers as well as inform both the design and analysis of the IPA interviews and the subsequent questionnaire.

### **3.3: Understanding youth engagement: Using IPA interviews**

The second stage of data collection applies Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); an interview technique designed to examine the experiences of an individual in relation to the topic of interest (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). As outlined in the opening of this chapter, the three-tiered design employed is based around the synthesis of findings across methodological tiers, which may initially appear to be at odds with the traditional application of IPA, given the emphasis placed on *emergent* properties of the data. In order to address this, the findings obtained from the initial content analysis were used primarily to structure the interview schedule (see *Appendix 3*), focusing on topics

relevant to the thesis and previous analysis, rather than to inform interpretation. The questions included in the interview schedule revolved around aspects specifically related to the case studies highlighted in *Chapters 4 and 5*. They also included reference to hypothetical or abstracted situations, in order to fully explore the participant's "insider perspective" (Conrad, 1987). The suitability of this methodology is based on the notion that the in-depth analysis contributes to the understanding of the results obtained in the final stage of analysis and emphasise the importance of the individual. In addition, the testimonies obtained in this secondary tier provide real world context for the assertions made in the content analysis.

By employing IPA in this way, the testimonies provide first hand evidence and accurate interpretations of individual agency (for those interviewed), particularly when taken in context of Berger and Luckmann's (1966) work, in which:

The reality of everyday life [for individuals] is organised around the 'here' of my body and the 'now' of my present. This 'here and now' is the focus of my attention to the reality of everyday life. What is 'here and now' presented to me in everyday life is the realissimum of my consciousness. (p. 36)

By emphasising the phenomenological components of individual engagement and agency, later methodological tiers are considered to be rigorously grounded in the most salient experiential aspects of British youth. These in-depth experiential events, "linked by a common, meaning" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; p. 2) are the areas of focus for *IPA*. In the context of this thesis, these experiential events focus on two main things. The first seeks to explore what it feels like to be part of the United Kingdom politically and how those sampled make sense of their role within society. The second addresses their involvement with media, be it social or legacy media, in an attempt to understand what impact these two constructs have on the interviewed person's feelings and attitudes towards political engagement. As such, it is important to identify the common meaning and significance of these events across those interviewed in order to discuss how these experiences impact perceptions of individual agency and efficacy.

Due the emphasis placed on making sense of these experiential events, *IPA* is an interpretative practice, meaning that the researcher is only able to assess what the participant is prepared to tell them. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) highlight the notion that researchers themselves are engaged in a form of double hermeneutic (hermeneutic deriving from the Greek "to interpret") in which the

participant firstly attempts to make sense of their own personal understanding of a given situation, before the researcher seeks to interpret that understanding themselves. From this position, the researcher is able to employ these interpretative skills consciously and systematically to the information being provided. The application of the double hermeneutic allows for an in-depth exploration of the participant's recollection and understanding of a given event, emphasising the "insider perspective" suggested by Conrad (1987).

### 3.3a: Philosophical underpinnings

As its title implies, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is rooted in phenomenological philosophic practices. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) highlight four main figures in this field as notable influences for IPA; these being Husserl (1927; 1970), Heidegger (1962), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre (1956). These figures can each be seen to contribute to the theoretical background of the approach. Their relative contributions are explored here as a preface for justifying the inclusion of IPA over alternative interview methods.

Beginning with the earliest theoretical contribution, Husserl (1927; 1970) emphasises the importance of self-reflection and in doing so advocates that phenomenology should involve the careful consideration of human experience. The main thrust of his work concerned finding the means by which an individual could accurately *know* their *own* experiences of an event or phenomenon and whether this could be done with sufficient rigor to identify the essential qualities of that particular event/experience. He claimed that those individuals seeking to pursue an understanding of their own important experiences must step outside of their *natural attitude*, that of our day to day existence. They must then adopt a *phenomenological attitude* which is defined by reflexive self-evaluation, rather than the outward focus on the world and objects around them. The following quote describes this precisely:

Focusing our experiencing gaze on our own psychic life necessarily takes place as reflection, as a turning of a glance which had previously been directed elsewhere. [Every experience] can be subject to such reflection, as can indeed every manner in which we occupy ourselves with any real or ideal objects – for instance, thinking, or in the modes of feeling and will, valuing and striving. So when we are fully engaged in conscious activity, we focus exclusively on the specific thing, thoughts, values, goals, or means involved, but not on the psychical experience as such, in which these things are known as such. [Only reflection reveals this to us]. Through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight-out – the values, goals and instrumentalities – we

grasp the corresponding subjective experiences in which we become 'conscious' of them, in which (in the broadest sense) the 'appear.' For this reason, they are called 'phenomena,' and their most general essential character is to exist as the 'consciousness-of' or 'appearance-of' the specific things, thoughts (judged states of affairs, grounds, conclusions), plans, hopes and so forth. (Husserl, 1927; para. 2) [Emphasis PR]

This quote highlights a number of similarities to Althusser's (1965) operationalisation of ideology, in that the world around us is constantly manipulated by past experiential events, both physical and psychically manifested. In addition, this understanding of the world around us can be changed by reflecting upon our own internally held beliefs regarding a particular topic, object or event. Furthermore, Husserl's (1927) interpretation of science as a second-order knowledge system also plays into Althusser's (1965) work on ideology and perceptions of knowledge (as it provides the method by which internal world representations are transformed into concrete transferable understandings of the world). However, there are some differences, namely that Husserl (1927) focuses on the internally derived meaning of events, whereas Althusser (1965) emphasises the prominent role of imposed ideology. Husserl (1927) develops the notion of "consciousness" in relation to "intentionality", which seems to simultaneously describe the process of existing and the exploration of these experiential events using IPA. Husserl states that while we are awake, we are constantly conscious of the world around us, even though we are not attending to the majority of stimuli presented to us by our senses. This in psychology is referred to as attentional bias, and can be applied to many areas, ranging from addiction (Kang et al., 2012) to threat perception (Bar-Haim et al., 2007) and demonstrates that individuals have a tendency to focus on environmental cues deemed important at the time while filtering out the excess to reduce the cognitive load. This is what Husserl (1927) means by intentionality; the deliberate focusing on certain items, objects and feelings.

Heidegger's contribution (1962) represents a development of the work of his mentor Husserl, though emphasises his divergence from Husserl's overly theoretical and abstract approach to phenomenology. Heidegger repeatedly uses the term "Dasein" (literally, "being-there") to define the unique quality of "human *being*". The focus on this existential component highlights the difference in focus between Husserl and Heidegger. While Husserl focused on what could be described as individual psychological processes, Heidegger was more concerned with the question of existence itself, particularly the Heideggerian notion of "worldliness". Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) define this as such:

The Heideggerian concept of 'worldliness' affords the embodied, [intentional] actor a range of physically grounded (what is possible) and intersubjectively-grounded (what is meaningful) options (p. 17) [Emphasis PR]

Though somewhat complex, this notion of "worldliness" essentially suggests that the world is not theoretically defined by what is physically there, but what gets used by the intentional actors existing within. The concept of "Dasein" is always part of the world as a whole and cannot be detached from language, objects and cultures; it is a simultaneous existence. The most important contributing factor of Heidegger's work to IPA is the notion that the individual is inextricably tied to the world that it inhabits and is forever a "person in context"; a notion that is replicated in both developmental psychology (Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001) and in cultural psychology (Cole, 1996); two fields that contribute significantly to understanding the results of this particular thesis.

Merleau-Ponty's (1962) and Sartre's (1956) contributions are more transparent extensions of both the work of Husserl and Heidegger and can be used to summarise Heidegger's often complex and opaque writings. Firstly, Merleau-Ponty provides an adapted definition of the 'worldliness' highlighted by Heidegger to one of embodiment; in which humans are distinct entities within the world, rather than explicitly part of it:

I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within a realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless (p. ix)

Merleau-Ponty also concerns himself with the subjectivity of interpersonal relations and the idea that all relations begin from a point of difference, due to differing experiential backgrounds. This notion is one that justifies the role of the researcher as the interpreter of the experiences recounted by the participant within IPA. Finally, Sartre (1956) stresses the idea that while humans possess self-awareness and seek meaning from the world around them, this is a continuous action-orientated behaviour and to be human is to constantly seek development and to "become". Kierkegaard (1974: p. 79) puts this succinctly in that "an existing individual is constantly in the process of becoming" and that the self is not a pre-given, but something to be revealed over time. Reflexivity helps us to identify this development and sense of being, making the process of conducting IPA as valuable for the participant as it is for the researcher. From these theoretical concepts, IPA can be seen to represent

an alternative to other existing interview methods that address the existential nature of humanity, whilst bridging the gap between science and phenomenology. The following sub-section explores alternate approaches to conducting the interviews required of this thesis and justify the selection of IPA as the method of choice.

### *3.3b: Justification and alternatives to IPA*

The inclusion of an interview stage is justified within this thesis based on the need for an experiential understanding of youth political engagement, particularly as this component is not explored in the other two approaches. Due to its reliance on the subjective and application of a double hermeneutic method of analysis, IPA is singularly situated to provide this experiential understanding. However, IPA is not unique in this focus and alternative interview techniques do exist. These alternative approaches are explored as part of this section before a justification for why IPA is indeed the most appropriate method for use in this thesis. The first of these alternative approaches are cognitive interviews (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992); however, their suitability is considerably less than that of IPA. The reason for this is that cognitive interview techniques focus on memory enhancement and are more concerned with *accurate* representations of events, rather than an individual's *understanding/interpretation* of those events. It is for this reason why it is most commonly applied in a forensic capacity, particularly eye-witness testimony (Geiselman, Fisher, MacKinnon & Holland, 1985).

The secondary alternative to IPA is that of grounded theory, proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory attempts to generate a theoretical-level account of a particular phenomenon and in doing so, research conducted using this technique is of much greater scale than other qualitative techniques. Considering that the IPA interviews make up only one part of this research methodology, the replacement of them with those derived from grounded theory would make this thesis unwieldy and impossible to complete within the time frame provided. More recent approaches to grounded theory such as constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) are more flexible and better suited to the needs of the thesis, but still generate too much data to be of use within the context of this particular methodology. Furthermore, these approaches neglect the phenomenological component of IPA that emphasises the importance of young people within the discussion of their political engagement.

The final potential alternative to IPA constitutes a broad spectrum of techniques termed Narrative Analysis approaches. The approaches were originally developed out of Bruner's (1990) work on social constructionism and these narrative approaches have a clear overlap with the phenomenological techniques employed by Heidegger (1962), Husserl (1927; 1970), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre (1956). There are three main approaches to those employing Narrative Analysis techniques. The first of these approaches is highlighted by the work of Gergen and Gergen (1988), who explore the constraints and opportunities particular structures impose upon an individual as they recount their own experiences or stories. The second approach, while similar to the first, focuses on the content of people's stories when they tell them (Crossley, 2000). The final approach is epitomised by the work of Andrews, Sclater, Squire and Treacher (2000) and focuses on the differences between our recollections of stories that are considered to be "out there" in the cultural realm and how they can be utilized as a format for expressing one's own life experiences. It is this approach that has the most in common with IPA, as outlined by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). In fact, the similarities between this final approach and work conducted using IPA highlight the reconstructive function of the methodology. Eatough and Smith (2008) highlight the value of storytelling in this extended quote:

When people tell stories of their lives, they are doing more than drawing the culturally available stock of meanings. People may want to achieve a whole host of things with their talk such as save face, persuade and rationalize, but there is almost always more at stake and which transcends the specific local interaction. Rosenwald (1992: 269) poignantly notes: 'If a life is no more than a story and a story is governed only by the situation in which it is told, then one cannot declare a situation unliveable or a life damaged.' Amongst other things it seems to us that our personal accounts are also concerned with human potential and development, with making our lives by connecting the past with the present and future (p. 185)

While the storytelling process outlined in the above quote does not feature heavily in the defined IPA methods, these narrative moments within a given testimony serve to contextualise the wider reflection undertaken by the participant and the subsequent analysis conducted by the researcher. As such, the accounts of those interviewed should be treated as valuable sources contributing to understanding, rather than the results of methods employed by this thesis. This is particularly important because although an individual's narrative does play a significant part in understanding the participant's background and interpretation of the event in question, it is the perceptions of agency and control that are the most important, when considering their role as predictors of political engagement (Ajzen, 1991; Bandura, 2001).

As with the initial content analysis, the IPA methodology is designed to assist in answering the highlighted research questions as well as support subsequent analysis. IPA can provide a valuable counterpoint to both the content analysis and questionnaire tiers, in that it emphasises the “here and now” present in Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) work.

By emphasising the phenomenological components of individual engagement, IPA allows for the development of the subsequent questionnaire, grounding it in the most salient experiential components of those interviewed. It is this intensely subjective experience that counteracts the often clinical results obtained from quantitative techniques. The double hermeneutic advocated by IPA (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) allows for the simultaneous integration of subjective experience and emergent themes derived from the participants. The double hermeneutic can be seen to parallel Schrøder’s (2012) justification for a multi-method approach, given the reduced generalisability of traditional qualitative approaches. This technique also remains integral to understanding media impact on engagement from an individual’s perspective, whilst drawing on the wider literature such as that by Copeland (2014) and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013), who highlight the importance of social media as a tool for facilitating more individualised forms of politics as well as others (Keeter et al., 2002; Sandovici & Davis, 2010; Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 2005). Ultimately, the findings of IPA provide a highly qualitative understanding of a very small sample of individuals from within the target population. It is for this reason that these findings are validated through the application of a quantitative questionnaire in the final tier.

### **3.4: Quantifying social media uptake and political engagement: A self-report questionnaire**

The final methodological tier uses a quantitative questionnaire to assess a number of the aspects of engagement that are touched upon in both the content analysis and interviews (See *Appendix 4*). Themes such as governmental trust, self-efficacy, political efficacy and self-esteem have been accounted for and the relevant standardised measures included (Acock, Clarke & Stewart, 1985; Anderson, John & Keltner, 2005; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2000; Niemi, Craig & Mattei, 1991). The measures contained within also include items focusing on the uptake of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as exposure to traditional legacy formats, such as newspapers, radio and television. These statistics can be compared to those obtained through the Hansard Society audit (2012) in order to assess the representative nature of the sample in relation to the national population. As previously elucidated, the series of standardised measures included here



are used to provide an accurate interpretation of the qualitative findings of the previous research tiers. This final tier differs from the previous two in that it does not directly focus on specific case studies, but rather utilises the notions identified therein to more accurately target areas of interest such as political efficacy, self-efficacy and self-esteem. Furthermore, the application of standardised psychological measures means that the findings of this final research tier can be generalised to a much larger extent than those that precede it.

#### *Questionnaire construction: Outlining the measures*

The questionnaire was designed to encompass some of the early questions used in the Hansard Society audit (2012), notably those associated with media uptake and usage. The reason for utilising questions from the Hansard Society audit rather than alternate sources such as the Pew Research Centre (2013) is due to the relevance and application of the findings. The Hansard Society is a British initiative seeking to quantify media usage within the UK specifically; making it highly relevant to the work undertaken within this thesis. The questions selected from the audit are further supplemented by more general metrics such as age and gender, in order to facilitate a more generalised view of the constructs being measured. The questionnaire also includes a series of standardised measures focusing on governmental trust, political efficacy, self-efficacy and self-esteem. These measures are integral to the exploration of agency within the thesis as they can be argued to represent particular facets of the concept as a whole (Ajzen, 1991 Bandura, 2001). The specifics of these individual measures will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

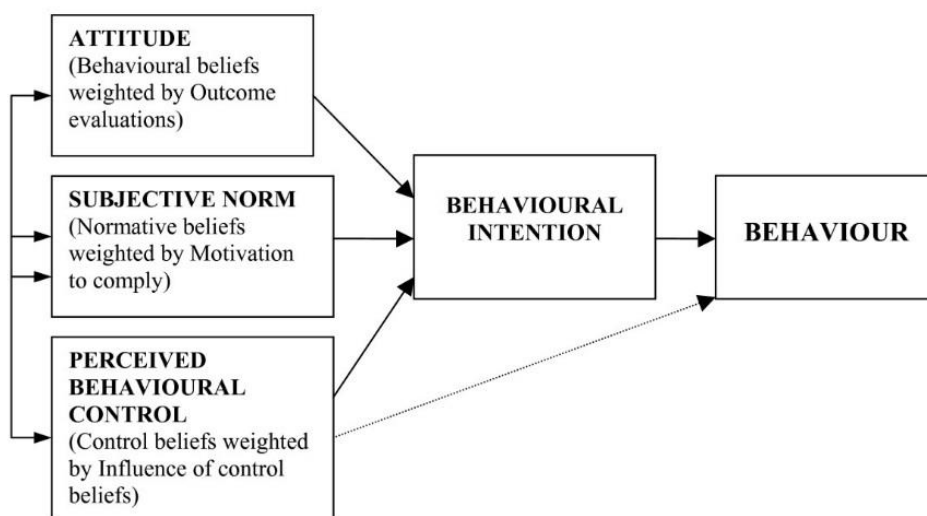
#### *Governmental Trust*

The development of this particular measure extends from Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán's (2000) original work concerning the creation of a "Brand Trust" scale. The justification for this is based on the notion that trust in the perceived quality of a brand and the brands reputation as a whole is a predictor of consumer loyalty, which in turn can be used to predict later behaviour relating to the acquisition and support of that brand.

Brand loyalty; the perception of quality and the intention to continually purchase a particular product, can be transposed directly onto Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour and Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory of mass communication. Both of these theories postulate that a series

of mental conditions must be satisfied for a specific behaviour to be replicated (see *Figure 3.4* for Ajzen's, 1991 model). In the case of Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán's (2000) measure, the behaviour in question would be the continued support for a brand. Bloemer and Kasper (1995) highlight brand loyalty as an integral part of how a consumer demonstrates his/her agreement with the performance of the product/service received; an important element that justifies this measure's transformation from one solely considering "brand trust" into an accurate assessment of governmental trust.

*Figure 3.4: Tiers of the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)*



Taking the score derived from the "brand trust" measure as a predictor of willingness to purchase a product, the component behaviours can be mapped onto the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). If done in this manner, they would look something like this; the first tier constituting internal mental processes, often subconscious though not exclusively. Attitudes could be seen to consist of positive evaluations relating to best value for money, reputation or perceived quality (Dick & Basu, 1994; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Sandvik & Duhan, 1996; Selnes, 1993). Subjective norms relate more directly to perceptions about the product obtained through other people's actions, or an obligation to continue that particular course of action; for example, the thought pattern of "everyone else always buys X, so it must be good". Perceived behavioural control represents the second of the internal aspects in the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), this sense of control can be applied to direct action or the boycotting of particular brands, centred around beliefs supporting one's own self control over their own behaviour (Baek, 2010). In this case, the behaviour denotes the continued purchase of a particular brand or the initial purchase (when considering advertising; Bandura, 2001).

At this stage, the Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán's (2000) "brand trust" measure can be seen to be useful when assessing civic engagement relating to political consumerism, along with general political efficacy and agency- considering that a standardised governmental trust measure does not currently exist. Indeed, when coupled with the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) it can be applied in a manner that teases out the motives behind that particular behaviour. However, it can also be applied to the political arena, given that political parties in the run up to elections often conduct themselves in a manner not dissimilar to large corporations' marketing strategies. In addition, many elements such as quality of final product and suitability for purpose are as equally applicable to voters as they are to consumers, which are indeed one and the same, according to Marcuse (1964). Furthermore, returning to Bloemer and Kasper's (1995) definition, the inclusion of "services" serves to increase the justification for transposing the original "brand trust" measure into one measuring governmental trust.

The reliability analysis of the adapted "brand trust" scale proposed by Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán (2000) was found to have high internal reliability ( $\alpha = .828$ ) by way of a preliminary assessment undertaken as part of this thesis. The adapted scale consisted of a reduced spread of Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán's original series of measures in order to match them more accurately to the construct being measured; in this case, governmental trust. This was achieved by substituting the desired brand with the phrase "chosen political party" in addition to making any grammatical changes required. Furthermore, though individual questions were removed due to their lack of suitability for measuring governmental trust, both dimensions of the subscale (Fiability & Intentionality) were still present. Several sampled governmental trust measures are outlined below:

*For each of the following statements, please select the point on the scale that best represents your opinion. [5 point Likert Scale rated STRONGLY AGREE to STRONGLY DISAGREE]*

- i. With my chosen political party I obtain what I look for in politics...*
- ii. I could rely on my political party to solve the problem...*
- iii. My chosen political party would make any effort to satisfy me as a member of society...*

### *Political Efficacy*

The political efficacy measure presented by Acock, Clarke and Stewart (1985) was adapted from Miller, Miller and Schneider (1980) and assessed in relation to the US and seven other countries (Austria, Finland, German Federal Republic, Great Britain, Italy, The Netherlands and Switzerland) along factors such as race, gender and political context. The quality of the political efficacy scale outlined by Miller, Miller and Schneider had previously been called into question prior to this reevaluation, based on the existence of underperforming or cross loading questions (tied to both internal and external efficacy; Neimi, Craig & Mattei, 1991). However, the findings of Caprara et al. (2009) have shown the scale to be robust both in and out of electoral contexts, highlighting two specific loading factors; internal measures of political efficacy and external measures.

These measures of internal and external political efficacy are described eloquently by Caprara et al. (2009) directly:

Internal political efficacy concerns personal beliefs regarding the ability to achieve desired results in the political domain through personal engagement and an efficient use of one's own capacities and resources. (p. 1002)

And

External political efficacy concerns people's beliefs that the political system is amenable to change through individual and collective influence. (p.1002)

With these definitions in mind, Caprara et al. raises a series of concerns with Acock, Clarke and Stewart's (1985) adapted measures, highlighting the inclusion of both leading questions and those that appear to load on both internal and external aspects of political efficacy. However, the most important factor that is highlighted by Acock, Clark and Stewart is that the measures themselves are valuable and internally reliable, but lack power when used as simple, equally-weighted additive indices. With this in mind, this methodological approach seeks to adapt this original method, by expanding the internal efficacy measures with those laid out by Neimi, Craig and Mattei (1991).

Neimi, Craig and Mattei's (1991) adaptation of the internal political efficacy measures presented by Acock, Clark and Stewart (1985) and Miller, Miller and Schneider (1980) is based on the results of the 1988 National Election study in the US. The new efficacy scale measures sought to

address concerns of underassessment in the original scale. When these new measures were combined with those of the original measure, the predictive capabilities of the original scale were vastly improved. The adapted measures demonstrate greater face validity than those described by Miller, Miller and Schneider (1980) and Acock, Clark and Stewart (1985). In addition to the improvements in face validity, Neimi, Craig and Mattei 's (1991) adaptation of the original 1980 measure provides an improvement in internal reliability of the scale. However, given the greater emphasis placed on internal and external measures of efficacy (resulting from the continued development of these earlier measures) Caprara et al.'s (2009) political efficacy measure is the most appropriate and is used within this thesis.

The political efficacy measure is used to fully unpack the importance of individual and collective efficacy in a political setting, particularly regarding perceived agency within the political system. As such, the purpose for this scale differs from that of Miller, Miller and Schneider (1980), Acock, Clark and Stewart (1985) and Neimi, Craig and Mattei (1991) as it focuses on the required abilities for individual citizens to take an agentic role in modern democracies. These abilities consist of the capacity to voice one's opinions, and actively contribute to the success of a party or group by exerting some control over one's elected representative (Dahl, 1998; Pasquino, 1997; Sartori, 2007). The measures themselves were adapted from Bandura's *guide to the construction of self-efficacy scales* (2006) and maintained a high level of internal reliability ( $\alpha=.858$ ), when assessed in the preliminary stages of data collection. Several sampled political efficacy measures are outlined below:

*For each of the following statements, please select the point on the scale that best represents your opinion of your own abilities. You are able to...* [5 point Likert Scale rated STRONGLY AGREE to STRONGLY DISAGREE]

- i. *State your own political opinion openly, even in clearly hostile settings.*
- ii. *Make certain that the political representatives you voted for honour their commitments to the electorate.*
- iii. *Actively promote the election of political candidates you trust.*

### *Self-Efficacy*

Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) study developed a staple measure frequently applied in questionnaires relating to human agency and perceived self-control, i.e. self-efficacy. Their original paper posits 10 questions that gauge an individual's perception of their own capacity to achieve goals and overcome difficulties. Those considered to exemplify high levels of self-efficacy are seen to select more challenging goals and are more likely to focus on "opportunities" rather than "obstacles" (De Vellis & De Vellis, 2000). Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour is often cited in relation to this particular measure, given the role that perceived behavioural control plays in influencing the final behavioural outcome. In the context of behavioural replication, perceived behavioural control and self-efficacy are considered synonymous constructs (Schwarzer & Luszczynska, n.d.). The measure itself is highly reliable ( $\alpha=.870$ ; when assessed in the preliminary stages of data collection), has been translated by the authors into over 20 languages and has been in regular circulation in various fields for the last 20 years. Therefore, this thesis utilises this measure in its original form.

The suitability of this measure for inclusion within this thesis derives from its focus on agency; a significant predictor of political engagement, when coupled with the possession of salient political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochschild, 2010). A secondary consideration that is in many ways as significant as the first is that it further encompasses Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour. Several sampled self-efficacy measures are outlined below:

*For each of the following statements, please select the point on the scale that you feel is most appropriate in describing you. [4 point Likert Scale rated NOT TRUE AT ALL to EXACTLY TRUE]*

- i. I can always solve problems if I try hard enough.*
- ii. If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.*
- iii. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.*

### *Self-Esteem*

The self-esteem measure proposed by Rosenberg (1979) is designed to assess an individual's perception of their own self-worth. It was originally designed for and administered to US high school students but since then has been applied to a broad range of populations successfully and is the most widely used measure of its type (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991; Gray-Little, Williams & Hancock, 1997;

Robins, Hendin & Trzesniewski, 2001). Furthermore, due to its substantial endorsement, it has received more empirical validation than any other of self-esteem measure (Byrne, 1996) and according to Grey-Little, Williams and Hancock (1997) it “could be shortened without compromising the measurement of global self-esteem” (p. 450).

The suitability of this measure for this thesis derives from the correlations identified between self-esteem and self-efficacy (Tharenou, 1979; Judge & Bono, 2001); namely that those scoring highly on measures of self-esteem frequently demonstrate similarly high scores in measures of self-efficacy. This same trend is also apparent when addressing the scores of political efficacy, to which both self-esteem and self-efficacy demonstrate a strong positive correlation. Therefore, in order to fully conceptualise and assess individual agency with regards to all aspects of political engagement, understanding individual self-esteem and what that means in relation to the observed compositional trends of news items during the content analysis, is integral. The measure was shown to be highly reliable, with an internal reliability recorded as  $\alpha=.879$ . Several sampled self-esteem measures are outlined below:

*For each of the following statements, please select the point on the scale that best represents your opinion. [5 point Likert Scale rated STRONGLY AGREE to STRONGLY DISAGREE]*

- i. I feel that I'm a person of worth.*
- ii. I am able to do things as well as most other people.*
- iii. I certainly feel useless at times.*

#### *Miscellaneous measures*

In addition to the standardised measures outlined so far, the questionnaire also included a series of measures designed to obtain descriptive statistics associated with media usage, such as time spent online, the types of social media used, newspaper readership and television news consumption. These are presented in a similar format to the other measures contained within the questionnaire. A series of these questions have also been taken directly from the Hansard Society audit (2012) and focus on the uptake of various media channels with the purpose of obtaining political information. These measures, though not associated with any particular standardised measure, are important to the thesis for several reasons. Firstly, they expand the reach of the interview stage as it provides quantifiable assessments of the responses obtained by the more limited interview sample. Secondly,

they help to identify the media usage behaviours of British youth, which may again affect the interpretation of the findings. Finally, they are indicators of behaviour that may assist in the deconstruction of media influence in terms of facilitating or inhibiting political engagement.

With regards to the suitability of the method for addressing the research question, this is tied to the role it plays within the mixed method approach. As mentioned previously, Schrøder (2012) highlights how qualitative methods are often unable to generate generalisable findings based on their focus on small samples, emphasising subjective experience. This is particularly true of IPA and to a lesser extent, the content analysis. Therefore, when it comes to answering the final research question, the findings derived from these methods (which appear more limited in scope), may contribute significant insight into the experience and appearance of media as a political platform. This is why a combination of these approaches is beneficial; the quantitative questionnaire possesses the potential to support the findings of the previous tiers, though does not possess significant depth itself, which is why both are required for the deep and nuanced understanding sought after in multi-method approaches (Schrøder, 2012). Returning to the positioning of this method, the benefit of it occurring after the IPA interviews is based on IPA's need for the application of a double hermeneutic in its analysis. The findings derived from the questionnaire are more likely to colour this analysis, preventing the emergence of unique themes derived from the individual testimonies of the participants, than the findings of the content analysis. This is because the findings of the content analysis do not look at user conceptions of engagement and instead focus on providing a broad typological map of the coverage that can be used to contextualise the testimonies of the IPA participants (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2010).

In conclusion, the methods employed in this thesis are designed to cover every aspect of the research questions in a manner that provides sufficient depth to allow for a discussion of agency and engagement in the British case. The methods were conducted in such a way as to avoid any ethical concerns and were flexible enough to allow for any amendments. Considering the application of a mixed methodology the flexibility is additionally useful in that the findings for the various tiers are able to strengthen any assessments made as part of this work overall, either by providing greater depth (in the case of qualitative approaches) or breadth (in the case of quantitative approaches). Furthermore, the application of the methods in this way represents a novel approach to exploring young people's feelings and attitudes towards political engagement, considering the emphasis placed on their own lived experiences.



## **Chapter 4: An exploration of four cases of political coverage as distributed by British broadsheet newspapers**

The following chapter presents the four political events that are used as case studies in the analysis of this thesis. Content analysis was applied in order to identify key features of legacy media coverage of the selected political events. This exploration of legacy media coverage in the this manner is important for two main reasons. Firstly, it allows for the generation of a topographical map of the coverage which can used to provide context for the analysis in later chapters. Secondly, it has been argued that simple exposure to these stories can influence individual agency and political efficacy (Balmas, 2012; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Dalton, 2002; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006). *Section 4.1* outlines the four cases studies that are the focal point of this chapter, making reference to the wider literature where appropriate. *Section 4.2* outlines both the sampling process and method of analysis undertaken in the remainder of the chapter and is followed by *Sections 4.3- 4.6*, which present the results of the analysis. *Section 4.7* concludes the chapter by discussing the results of the content analysis and highlights how these are to be applied in subsequent chapters.

### **4.1: Legacy media coverage of four political events: Justifying case selection**

The following section makes reference to the literature concerning political engagement and political consumerism, with the aim of contextualising the four case studies that are used throughout the remainder of the thesis. With this in mind, the works of de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006), McQuail (2002) and Tsfat, Tukachinsky and Peri (2009) are of particular importance to this discussion, due to their focus on political knowledge acquisition, media distribution strategies and the impact these organisations have on political trust, both currently and historically.

The first two cases cover two examples of constitutional political engagement (the Scottish Referendum and the British General Election), encompassing two voting formats (general election and a referendum) due to the differences attributed to each in terms of format and turnout. Coverage of these events is integral to the health of a democracy, due to the role agenda-setting media plays in providing the salient political knowledge required for a strong, politically mobile electorate (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochschild, 2010). However, there is significant debate (illustrated here by Curran et al., 2014) surrounding the extent to which legacy media coverage of contemporary political events fosters engagement with the political sphere, with some going as far

as to suggest that legacy media coverage is responsible for creating the political apathy associated with young people (Armstrong, 2005; Balmas, 2012; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Levy & Rickard, 1982). The work of Pontes, Henn and Griffiths (2017) can be used in this context to suggest how the legacy media might reframe the discourse surrounding “apathetic” youth and instead of emphasising a lack of engagement, identify “meaningful opportunities” for young people to engage with and influence the political sphere.

The two remaining cases explore coverage pertaining to two non-constitutional political events (Occupy: Parliament Square and the Anti-Fracking campaign). An exploration of legacy coverage of non-constitutional political events is important to this thesis for two main reasons. Firstly, there are those within the wider literature who highlight the frequency with which young people engage with, and take part in these sorts of political acts (Copeland, 2014). In fact McIntyre (2012) has suggested young people are engaging with politics in new and often forceful ways, outside of what could be considered “political” (Strømsnes, 2009). Secondly, the coverage of these events frequently sees the actors portrayed negatively or demonised for their involvement (Donson, Chesters, Welsh & Tickle, 2004); which- when applied to the definition of agency outlined by Bandura (2001) and Jeannerod (2003)- stands to have a strong negative impact on efficacy and by extension political engagement. The two non-constitutional cases cover both political consumerism (which is considered apolitical by the literature; Marcuse, 1964) and more conventional forms of non-constitutional political engagement. The reason for separating non-constitutional political events in this manner is due to the strong predilection of Western youth toward consumer acts such as boy/buycotts online (Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti., 2005). These consumer events can be defined as non-constitutional (considering that they also do not occur within endorsed modes of political engagement) but have been neglected as truly political acts by the wider literature, given the market-consumer relationship and emphasis on lifestyle-based politics, rather than direct involvement with any form of government (Gil de Zúñiga, Copeland, & Bimber, 2013; Stolle et al., 2005). More detail on the justification of political consumerism as a “political” act is provided in *Section 2.3*.

#### **4.2: Exploring legacy media coverage: The process of sampling and analysing selected articles**

The content analysis undertaken in this chapter focuses on the form and content of legacy media coverage of four cases relating to constitutional and non-constitutional political events. The sampled articles focused on the coverage of the Scottish Referendum 2014, the British General Election 2015, Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 and the Anti-Fracking campaign 2014/15. The purpose

of this content analysis was to lay the foundation for a more detailed assessment of these cases in *Chapter 5* and provide a reference point for interpreting the testimonies of *Chapter 6*. As such, it should not be treated as a data chapter in and of itself, but rather as an introduction to the cases that feature more prominently elsewhere.

### *Sampling*

The sampled articles were obtained from LexisNexis (an online database collating a variety of print media) and covered the period between 13 June 2014 and 14 May 2015. For each case, sampling began two weeks prior to the event in question and included articles published one week after its conclusion. This was done in order to account for any preliminary discussions concerning the events in question and to account for subsequent debate surrounding the result of the event (in the case of the Scottish Referendum or General Election) and to assess the overall response to the demonstration or protest (in the case of the Anti-Fracking campaign or Occupy: Parliament Square). It is acknowledged that for non-constitutional events, the majority of content will have been obtained around the specific day(s) in question or after event. However in order to maintain parity, the same sampling method was applied to both constitutional and non-constitutional coverage alike.

The cases consisted of approximately 40 articles each and were drawn from national broadsheet newspapers over the periods outlined above. The majority of articles were sampled from *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, due to their primacy as national broadsheets and political leaning (centre right to centre left). However, considering the lack of legacy media coverage of Occupy: Parliament Square, *The Observer* was included in the sampling for Occupy: Parliament Square, despite being a Sunday paper rather than a daily. Each paper contributed approximately ten articles to all cases with the exception Occupy: Parliament Square, where the number of articles was greatly diminished amongst all papers. The inclusion of the *The Observer* and the use of a reduced sample represented an attempt to generate parity across all cases, though this was only partially successful. As such, the reduced and incongruent nature of the sample in this content analysis is insufficient to provide generalisable findings, but is adequate to complete the initial exploration of the four cases as intended. Additionally, it is worth noting that articles on the British General Election 2015 and on Occupy: Parliament Square are explored in greater depth in *Chapter 5* where data obtained from Twitter is also considered.

### *Coding and Process of Analysis*

The analysis was conducted using bespoke coding sheets, these were adapted on a case by case basis to explore the 130 articles covering the four case studies (see *Appendix 2*). Subsequent research conducted by Rohde (2018) and Schwalbe, Keith and Silcock (2018) supports the methods employed during the design of these materials. The coding sheets consisted of four sections; the first providing an initial assessment of the primary and secondary themes within the article, which were generated through a preliminary reading of the selected articles. The second recorded the most cited sources (Governmental organisations, Community groups, Persons/Citizens. etc.), actors and power relations (subjectively assessed as Collaborative, Fractured, Opposed or Not Addressed). The third section focused on youth representation within the article, noting whether they were cited and how (Inference, Impersonation, Direct Quotation). The final section included a measure of key terms (by frequency), which was generated after a thorough reading of the articles and qualitatively weighted based on the emergent themes. This basic structure was tailored for each of the sampled events by adapting the primary and secondary themes and key terms. The results of these coding sheets were compiled case by case and used to generate a series of descriptive statistics that provided a general overview of each event, as told by the legacy media.

#### **4.3: Scottish Referendum 2014** (for the coding sheet see *Appendix 2.1*)

The Scottish Independence Referendum was held on the 18<sup>th</sup> on September 2014 and asked voters to determine whether Scotland should secede from the English-Scottish Union established in 1707. The vote registered a turnout of 4,283,392 (approximately 85% of the Scottish population), 55% of which voted against independence versus the 45% in favour of Scotland's secession (Electoral Commission (2014)). The overall "no" result ensured the maintenance of the long-standing union, though caused some division between the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the other British political parties (this division is explored in greater detail in the coverage of the British General Election below).

The Scottish Referendum 2014 is important to the discussion contained within this thesis for three main reasons. First, is that it represented an early opportunity to explore legacy media coverage of a constitutional political event. Secondly as a referendum, it constituted an alternative engagement process based on a binary decision with a clear outcome; something that is not the case with a General Election, whereby one votes for a political party rather than on a particular policy. The difference in format is important considering that Schuck and de Vreese (2011) suggest that higher turnouts at

referendums are due to the binary nature of the choice and ability for those participating to feel as though they influenced the vote directly when compared to General Elections. Finally, the Scottish Referendum is tied directly to the United Kingdom's involvement with the European Union, linking it to the initial pilot study covered in *Appendix 1*. Furthermore, the case itself encompassed a number of significant topics that can be seen to impact or be referred to in the other case studies. The most notable of these topics are EU membership (which features prominently in the coverage of the British General Election) and economic instability (which represents one of the key discussion points in the Anti-Fracking campaigns occurring concurrently with the referendum). These topics were coded as either primary or secondary themes in *Table 4.1*. This table - which is replicated for all subsequent cases - provides a description of the themes used in the coding process, in addition to data indicating the percentage of articles in which they appeared as either the primary or secondary theme. It is important to note that whilst the themes were generated from detailed readings of the selected articles, some of these themes (Policy Information/Vote) appear as null values in *Table 4.1*. Whilst these themes existed within select articles, they were not prominent enough to be considered primary or secondary themes but have been included for posterity. These topics were often employed in the analysis as supporting evidence for a meta-narrative relating to the British General Election, or used to emphasize the lack of certainty regarding outcome of any form of split. Interestingly, these topics also share a common motif; that of a long-lived union.

The primary focus of the articles relating to the Scottish Referendum case hinged on a "Unity vs. Separation" narrative (indicated by the two opposed – yet linked- themes). This is demonstrated in *Table 4.1*, with heavy emphasis being placed on the uncertainty of separation as well as the overall outcome of the vote. As such, the continued emphasis on the longevity of the union could be seen to reinforce the strong "unity" narrative presented with the coverage. The coverage relies on the terms such as "Britain", "British" and "UK", which see 108 citations across the sampled articles and makes regular reference to the economic threat posed by separation (forcing identification with the *British* in-group, in accordance with Tajfel & Turner's social identity theory; 1986) again shown in *Table 4.1*. Furthermore, when addressing the narrative of "Unity vs. Separation", the focus on conflict and uncertainty could be argued to support the work of Levy and Rickard (1982) who neatly describe much of the agenda-setting media coverage here in that.

Table 4.1: Themes identified in the content analysis of articles about the Scottish Referendum

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Articles in which this is a Primary Theme (%)</i>	<i>Articles in which this is a Secondary Theme (%)</i>
The Economy	Discussions here focused on the economic impact of Scotland's secession from the union, both in terms of Scotland's future and in relation to the United Kingdom as a whole.	18%	8%
Separation	The dialogue surrounding separation emphasises the negative outcome of Scotland seceding England. Much of this discussion focuses on uncertainty and why Scotland should vote against Independence.	48%	28%
Unity	The unity theme represents the positive reasons for remaining part of the union. The dialogue here emphasises stability and combined economic strength. There is a clear attempt to appeal to national pride.	13%	18%
Policy Information/Vote	This theme is used to aggregate the topics related to the actual political outcome of Scotland's secession and how it might actually impact the populations daily lives. It also covers a discussion of polling in the run up to the vote and voter turnout after the 18 <sup>th</sup> of September.	-	-
Other	This theme is designed to address any remaining topics that were not covered by the other four themes. Topics of interest here are Fracking and EU membership.	23%	43%

[media coverage of the events is often] highly dramatic, [focusing on] conflict orientated messages that emphasise and exaggerate the inability of individuals to predict and control their own lives. (p.1)

The content analysis revealed that the legacy media coverage of the Scottish Referendum primarily relied on information sourced from the governmental organisations (35% of the articles). Notably, many of these sources were located south of the Scottish border and accompanied by an emphasis on English politicians. The focus on English politicians such as David Cameron and Ed Miliband could be argued to be to the detriment of their Scottish counterparts, given the presumed bias. However, within the coverage of *The Guardian*, Scottish leaders such Nicola Sturgeon and Patrick Harvey see greater representation. 30% of the articles cited an English politician as the primary power focus - with David Cameron the most cited among these- reiterating the prominence of English actors with the coverage. Scottish MP's represent the second power focus within many of the articles. However, rather than directly referred to by name (as with the English politicians) they are referred to in abstraction, either as the "SNP" or simply "Scotland". It could be argued that this was done in order to present the opposition north of the border as leaderless or promote an "us versus them" mentality (with regards to pro-leave supporters). Overall, what this does do is solidify David Cameron's precedence within the debate, as even Labour are only occasionally referenced; these references often focus on Ed Miliband's inability to compete with David Cameron on this topic, as shown by this quote from Peter Osborne of *The Daily Telegraph* (2014):

Mr Cameron can command the support of the vast majority of his party on this potent issue. He has thrown down a challenge to the Labour Party with which Ed Miliband has so far been unable to cope.

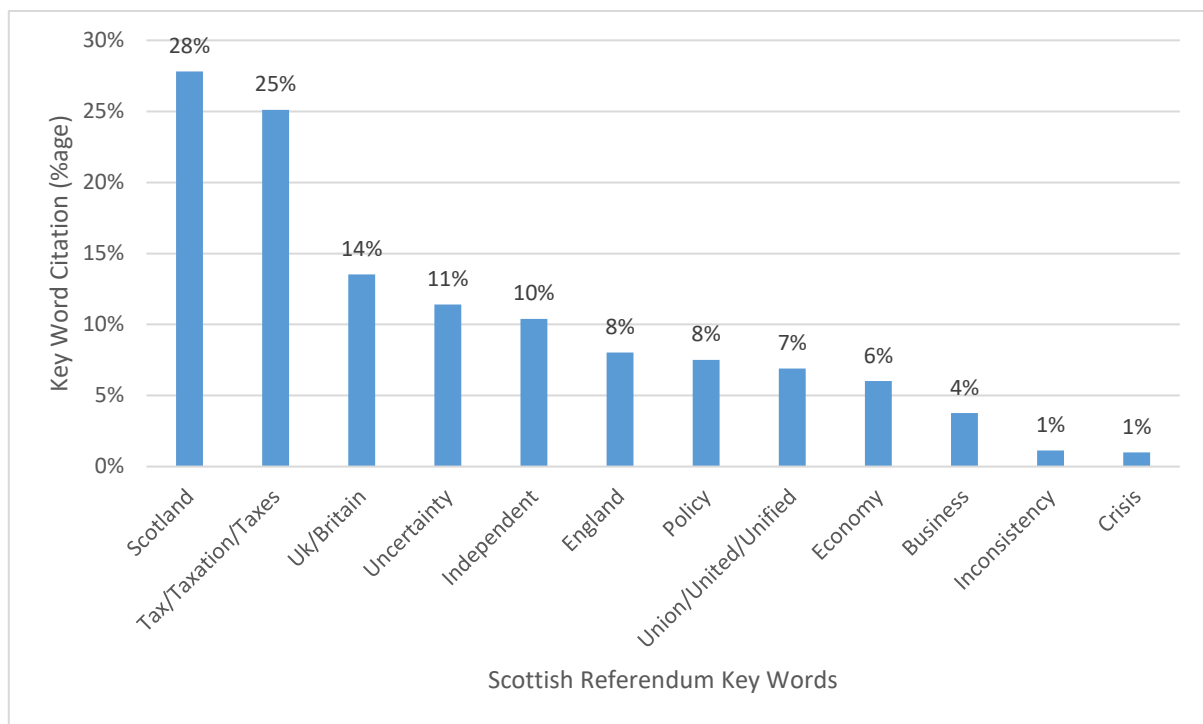
The emphasis on comparing campaign strategy is addressed by Iyengar, Norpoth and Hahn (2004) in their work concerning journalist's use of horse race styled narratives during political campaigns. They suggest that it is this greater emphasis on strategy rather than hard news regarding policy that prove popular amongst readers who are more politically engaged. However, they also highlight that by neglecting "hard news" stories there is potential to alienate those seeking the information required to make a decision on the matter at hand.

As with citations of the Labour party in the selected articles, there were only minor references made to citizen-led initiatives and referrals to individual perspectives on the referendum in the sampled articles. These referenced testimonies were primarily used to bracket and accent the primary narrative of "Unity vs. Separation", as shown by this quote by Stephen Simmons in the article by Chris Green of *The Independent* (2014):

[who] is contemptuous about the debate over Scotland's future, believing "everything's fine as it is"

While the Scottish public does receive some coverage within the sampled articles (60% of articles cite the Scottish population directly at least once), those aged 18-25- along with their views- were subsumed as part of the general population and not specifically addressed. *Figure 4.1* (as well as *Figures 4.2 - 4.4*) illustrates each of the key terms and their percentage citation when compared to the other key words highlighted by the coding sheet. It is important to note the volume and disparity of citations concerning “England” and “United Kingdom/Britain” when compared to citations of “Scotland”. This could suggest that the British legacy media are advocating the maintenance of the dominant ideology (Althusser, 2014)- that of political union between Scotland and England - by the avoidance of mentioning the popular “leave” movements online.

*Figure 4.1: Scottish Referendum Word Frequencies*



When employing Leets’ (2000) work on framing, it can be argued that many of the references to Scotland’s succession are used to obfuscate the potential benefits for the Scottish population (should they secede the union), which- despite the gravity of the decision and relevance to the average person- are barely addressed. So, when taking Delli Carpini and Keeter, (1996) and Hochschild’s (2010) assertions (that the national press should foster a discussion of salient political information in order to generate a politically mobile electorate), it could be argued that the coverage provided by the



sampled legacy media outlets does not provide a credible counter-argument to Scotland remaining part of the United Kingdom.

#### **4.4: British General Election 2015** (for the coding sheet see *Appendix 2.2*)

The British General Election 2015 was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, electing the 56<sup>th</sup> parliament of the United Kingdom and reported a turnout of 66% (UK Political Info., n.d.). It saw David Cameron and the Conservative party voted in as a single majority despite the expectation that as with 2010, voting would result in a hung parliament. The Conservative victory allowed David Cameron to schedule a referendum to renegotiate Britain's membership to the European Union. The topic of the referendum is touched upon in the coverage of the Scottish Referendum and in the coverage Anti-Fracking campaign, covered later. This particular case is integral to the discussion contained within this thesis as it represents the most contemporary political event from within the sampled time period and provides the baseline from which to compare all other forms of engagement.

There are three core reasons why the legacy media coverage of the British General Election and Scottish Referendum are vital to this thesis. The first reiterates what was said in *Section 4.1* regarding types of constitutional engagement. Unlike a referendum, a General Election takes place once every five years (disregarding exceptional circumstance) making them less unique- something that Schuck and de Vreese (2011) touch upon when they justify the increased turnout of referendums compared to these elections. Secondly, there is considerable legacy media coverage in the run up to the event and the discourse surrounding the various parties- coverage of their manifestos and potential outcomes is extensive. The third reason (and perhaps the most important to this thesis), hinges on the significance of this election to British young people. General elections represent significant turning points in the political lives of the national population and as such should be explored; particularly as the 2015 General Election represented the first political outing for some of the participants in *Chapters 6 and 7* (considering the age of the sample, 18-25). As such, the findings of this chapter and *Chapter 5* provide narrative context for those testimonies in relation to the legacy and social media coverage of the time.

The coverage of the British General Election 2015 event was diverse, with topics ranging from the political aptitude of the various candidates to the potential for a renegotiation of Britain's EU membership. The primary theme was that of "Electoral Uncertainty"; a topic set to questions

regarding EU membership (resulting from the fallout of the Scottish Referendum in the preceding year) and the fear of the populist UK Independence Party (the full list of themes are provided in *Table 4.2*).

Of the articles sampled, 40% of them cite governmental organisations separate from the political parties (presumably to maintain impartiality) as their primary sources of information on the election. These sources were used to comment on points of uncertainty within the electoral race and party manifestos, notably austerity, the EU and UKIP's rise in popularity. However, due to the emphasis placed on uncertainty in the pre-election coverage, there is no clear power focus. This is particularly apparent considering the diversity of politicians cited across all parties and the roughly comparable number of direct citations of each. However, after polling on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May, there was an increase in frequency of citations of Conservative MP's, most notably George Osborne and David Cameron - unsurprising when considering their success at the election. In terms of a secondary power focus, this typically consisted of Conservative opposition across the entirety of the sampled time period, with Nigel Farage, Nicola Sturgeon and Ed Miliband cited regularly. Despite the lack of a clear primary power focus in these articles, Labour, UKIP and the SNP are all frequently shown to represent strong alternatives to the Conservative party on the main "issues" of EU membership and austerity. The quote below from Andrew Grice of *The Independent* (2015) demonstrates how the Scottish National Party was shown to wield considerable influence in government, due to its ties with the Labour party despite its small size.

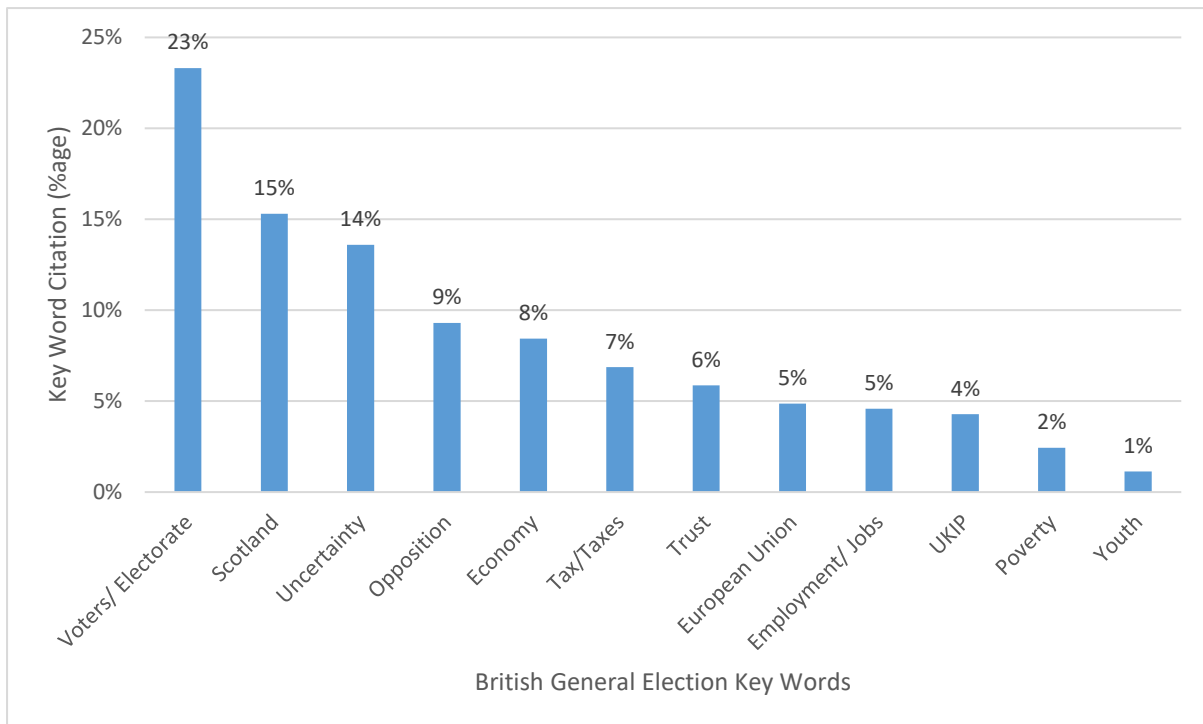
Ed Miliband is adamant he would do "no deals" with the SNP if Labour fails to win a majority in tomorrow's election - but could still rely on its informal support to keep a Labour government in power.

The presumed power of minority parties like UKIP and the SNP could be argued to have contributed to the overall narrative of uncertainty within the sampled articles. Unlike the frequencies derived from the Scottish Referendum, there is no stand out citation, though "Uncertainty" and "Voters/Electorate" occupy a significant proportion of the coverage. The significance of political "Opposition" and major concerns such as "Scotland", the "Economy" and "Tax" are demonstrated to be highly relevant to the coverage overall, accounting for just under half of all citations within the sampled articles (See *Figure 4.2*).

*Table 4.2: Themes identified in the content analysis of articles about the British General Election*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Articles in which this is a Primary Theme (%)</i>	<i>Articles in which this is a Secondary Theme (%)</i>
Election Uncertainty	The theme of election uncertain focused on two main points. The first being the initial result of the election, the second was tied to fallout of those elected.	33%	40%
Politician Popularity	Politician popularity represented an extension of the uncertainty theme. It warrants its own section given how individual personality played a significant part both in the campaign strategies of the various parties and the weight given to perceived incompetence of the candidates.	23%	15%
Scottish Independence	Scottish Independence was brought up repeatedly within the coverage a point by which to measure the competency of the candidates. It also could be argued to facilitate a wider discussion regarding EU membership.	13%	40%
The Economy	The theme of the economy covered the various solutions offered by the candidates with regards to reducing the national deficit and avoiding another recession.	13%	10%
Other	This theme is designed to address any remaining topics that were not covered by the other four themes. Topics of interest here are EU membership and threat of far right movements like UKIP.	20%	23%

Figure 4.2: British General Election Word Frequencies



Of the sampled articles, 48% of them made some reference to young people, though never directly. The majority of these references were made indirectly through inference and with some degree of cynicism, as shown here in this quote addressing the popularity of Russell Brand amongst Britain’s youth from Janice Turner of *The Times* (2015):

It is ludicrous that a perpetual adolescent pushing 40 can represent youth. Yet today's 20-somethings will, like Brand with his art student top-knot, struggle to grow up. With a job, property and a family, youthful apathy usually turns into political engagement. Our children will fight for a stake in the system. So, will they proceed through life never bothering to vote?

Given the exclusion of young people from the debate and only limited reference to the national population within the body of the articles, the British legacy media could be seen to actively distance certain groups from discussions of policy (a feeling that is explored in the testimonies of *Chapter 6*). With this in mind, when returning to Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) and Hochschild’s (2010) assertion (that the national press should provide a discussion of policy and other political information), it can be argued that the major concerns of the electorate are being neglected within the coverage. Instead, legacy media organisations focus on established politicians and individuals - presumably with the aim of selling more newspapers and/or maintaining the status quo, as suggested by Marcuse (1964) and Herman and Chomsky (1988).

#### **4.5: Occupy: Parliament Square 2014** (for the coding sheet see *Appendix 2.3*)

The second set of cases, were directed towards addressing non-constitutional political events (Copeland, 2014; Stolle et al., 2009). The reasoning behind exploring content focusing on non-constitutional engagement is that these forms of political action appear to be gaining ground, with “elite challenging forms of participation... becoming more widespread” (Inglehart, 1997 p. 236). These forms of engagement are often facilitated and “characterised by the rise of networks, issue associations and lifestyle coalitions” (Bennett, 1998 pp. 745; Copeland, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga, Copeland & Bimber, 2014). These are most notably online networks that have demonstrated a significant impact in both the Egyptian revolution (Papcharissi & de Fatima Oliviera, 2012; Fuchs, 2012) and London Riots (Fuchs, 2012), be it in terms of facilitating violence or co-ordinating clean-up. The Occupy: Parliament Square case sees the most use in *Chapters 5* and *6* where it represents the non-constitutional counterpoint to the British General Election. Furthermore, the Occupy case was perhaps the most prominent example of non-constitutional political engagement during the period of data collection, making its inclusion in the analysis reasonable.

Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 was a week-long event ending on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October. The Occupy movement itself is an international socio-political group focused on challenging social inequality, with the aim of promoting “real democracy” around the world (Occupy, N.D.). The first instance of the group gaining mainstream awareness was during Occupy: Wall Street in 2011. Since then, the group has seen demonstrations across the globe on every continent (with the exception of Antarctica; Thompson, 2011). The event in London in 2014 sought to raise awareness on a variety of issues, including the closure of UK hospitals, fracking and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Parliament Square was selected as the location for the protest, given its history as a meeting point for peaceful protest by local citizens. Occupy: Parliament Square was selected for inclusion in this chapter because the Occupy Movement is both contemporary and fairly representative of variety of non-constitutional groups, in terms of focus, membership and emphasis on “the multitude”.

As mentioned in *Section 4.2*, the sample of articles contained for the Occupy: Parliament Square case was significantly reduced. In this section, some explanation as to why this reduced sample may be relevant is addressed and why it may also be pertinent to the discussion of this event. The primary theme within the sampled articles was that of “Police Control”, focusing on the seizure

of pizza boxes and umbrellas (due to their classification as sleeping equipment or a structure designed to facilitate camping overnight), by police operating under the “2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act” (Home Office, 2011). The second theme focuses on the opposite, highlighting the unusual approach taken by the police in face of what is described as a “peaceful protest” at the site designed for that very purpose. Interestingly, there is very little coverage devoted to the purpose of the event itself; democracy (given the reduced sample size quantitative figures should be treated with caution; see *Table 4.3*). In fact, much of the coverage focuses on the popularised name “*Occupy: Parliament Square*” rather than the official title: “*Occupy: Democracy*”.

The sources used within the articles are a combination of governmental organisations such as the Home Office (making up approximately 20% of cited sources) - which sought to provide insight on the legislation surrounding the “2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act” mentioned above - and pressure groups such as Occupy itself as well as the National Union of Students (accounting for another 40% of cited sources). The primary power focus appears to be non-governmental organisations such as the protest groups themselves, despite the limited number direct citations. The limited citation of those involved in the demonstration (only 30% of articles cited the demonstrators directly) means that the coverage frequently neglects the intended purpose of the demonstration (that of raising awareness the closure of UK hospitals, fracking and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership). The secondary power focus emphasised the broader community and police forces, highlighting the disruption posed by the protesters and the lack of shared interest.

Unlike the previous two constitutional cases, there is frequent reference to young people (only 20% of articles do not make any reference to young people), though this is done on their behalf through inference, rather than through direct citation. These references are made in the form of direct statements, supposedly representing them; inferring the aims of the protest and youth involvement with the demonstration, as shown in the following quote from Jenny Green as cited by Tom Harper of *The Independent* (2014):

My sympathy is with the protesters. We have a real problem with democracy in this country and they were expressing their views. The police response was like something from Hong Kong.

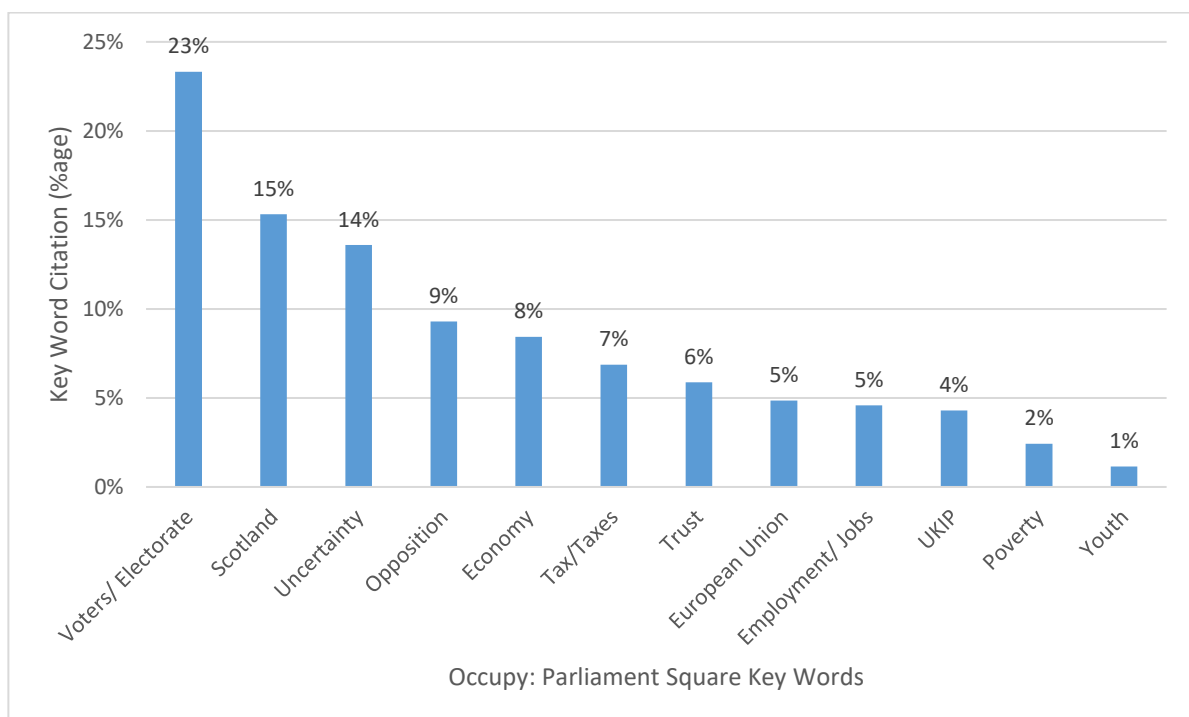
Table 4.3: Themes identified in the content analysis of articles about Occupy: Parliament Square

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Articles in which this is a Primary Theme (%)</i>	<i>Articles in which this is a Secondary Theme (%)</i>
Police Control	This theme discussed the appropriateness of police behaviour in controlling the demonstration.	50%	10%
Political Representation	The theme addressed youth involvement in the demonstration, though frequently neglected the purpose of the event instead focusing on the involvement of notable figures such as Jenny Jones.	-	20%
Peaceful Protest	Peaceful protest represented a notable subtheme which was frequently subsumed as a primary theme under police control. Some reference is made to the suitability of Parliament Square as a location for the demonstration.	10%	60%
Illicit Occupation	The emphasis here is on the assumed criminality of the demonstrators. The threat posed to the grass of Parliament Square is a common reference as well as the seizure of illegal “structures”	10%	-
Other	This theme is designed to address any remaining topics that were not covered by the other four themes. The arrest of Jenny Jones is the most important to here.	30%	10%

“Protest” represents the most frequently cited word across the sampled articles which is unsurprising, followed closely by coverage of “Policy” (see Figure 4.3). In this context, “Policy” seems to directly refer to the “2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act” (Home Office, 2011) and is used to justify or contextualise several of the arrests made over the course of the demonstration. The use of “Protest” as one of the dominant words within the coverage is important, particularly

given the regular citation of words like, “Illegal”, “Criminal” and “Violence” in relation to their less morally loaded counterparts. “Representation” is also something worthy of note, considering the precedence it is given within the sample, though it is odd that it is more frequently used than “Democracy”- the official title of the demonstration. In addition, the lack of word count afforded to representatives from the movement itself is concerning, as well as the lack of coverage of the demonstration within the British legacy media as a whole. It is at this point that the reduced sample (of 10 articles) goes some way to justifying itself; because of the need to widen the sample to account for such limited coverage in the original four papers, the discussion of youth representation within articles appears deliberately limited. This is particularly noteworthy, considering that the majority of the stories focus on police involvement in the demonstration, rather than the purpose of the demonstration itself.

Figure 4.3: Occupy: Parliament Square Word Frequencies



The work of Althusser (2014) and Leets (2000) can be applied to the coverage of this event, whereby the legacy media coverage of key moments during the event could be argued to advocate a particular position rhetorically. The frequent use of “Protester”, “Police” and “Arrest” demonstrate this point by emphasising the civil disruption component of the demonstration, rather than its intended purpose. By using the term “Protesters”, those involved are abstracted to the point where



they can be seen to have limited agency. This abstraction is also achieved through the lack of direct quotations obtained from the demonstrators themselves. Furthermore, the coverage goes so far as to include reference to the legal precedent for the seizure of “illicit items”, which again shifts the focus away from the demonstration and its intended purpose. The resulting coverage sublimates the discourse of the event from a demonstration concerning the reclamation of the democratic process, into one focused on the criminality of the “protesters” and the protection of the grass of Parliament Square, (Althusser, 2014; Marcuse, 1964). Clearly, detailed coverage of non-constitutional political events may not be in the best interest of organisations with a vested interest in the existing government, which may account for the lack of coverage and use of key words in the manner outlined above. Overall, the exclusion of the articles (based on the limited availability of a credible sample), can be seen to exert a frame of coverage that obscures the concerns of a group of the electorate that is frequently cited as politically disinterested and apathetic, thus maintaining the status quo (Armstron, 2005; Leets, 2000).

#### **4.6: Anti-Fracking campaign 2014-2015** (for the coding sheet see *Appendix 2.4*)

The coverage of the Anti-Fracking campaign 2014-2015 represents only a small part of an ongoing movement within the UK called “Frack Off”. The group itself is vocal about the threat posed by fracking in terms of property damage, general public safety and environmental impact (Frack Off, N.D.). The period sampled here represented an upswing in the movement’s activity in the run up to the Scottish Referendum (later that year) and the British General Election (the following year). As such, the legacy media coverage of Anti-Fracking campaign sees significant cross-over with both the coverage of the Scottish Referendum 2014 and the British General Election in 2015, due to its importance in terms of policy and the parties involved. Ultimately, this case-study focuses on the discourse surrounding the ban of shale gas extraction in the north of England and Scotland. The coverage touches upon a number of pressure groups (in particular Frack Off) that have been lobbying for a ban on shale gas extraction and on governmental initiatives seeking to monetise its extraction with the intention to provide a more cost-effective alternative to oil. The Anti-Fracking campaign case is mostly used *Chapter 6* where it helps with interpreting how individual experiences of political consumer behaviours may have been impacted by social and legacy media coverage.

The value of exploring the legacy media coverage of the 2014-2015 Anti-Fracking campaign is tied to the notion that it is a prime example of political consumerism (given how it focuses on lifestyle

choices and environmental concerns rather than directly challenging governmental policy). The reason for focusing on political consumer events such as the Anti-Fracking campaign is because this particular type of political engagement has been shown to be on the rise in younger demographics, such as those aged 18-25 (Stolle et al., 2005; Ward & de Vreese, 2011) and appears to be a form of engagement heavily influenced and facilitated by social media (Gustafsson, 2012; Ostman, 2012), making it highly relevant to the discussion contained in *Chapters 6 and 7*.

The primary theme identified within the coverage of the Anti-Fracking campaign covered the feasibility of a Fracking ban and the impact it would have on oil prices (See *Table 4.4*). This theme is regularly addressed within the austerity measures of the time and highlights a national “need” for foreign investment. With this in mind, governmental sources suggested that it would be irresponsible to not to inject funds into a fledgling industry that may provide some competition to organisations such as Ineos energy (a major international petrochemical company). As if to counterpoint this position, many of the stories sampled explored claims relating to the misinterpretation of scientific sources, focusing on the safe extraction of shale gas. This misinterpretation is accompanied by an admonishment of the idealism surrounding the campaign, exaggerating the threat espoused by the Anti-fracking lobby - as seen in this quote from Paul Younger of *The Times* (2015):

the fuss which has greeted UK shale gas proposals has portrayed it as an apocalyptic development with unfathomable scope for damage.

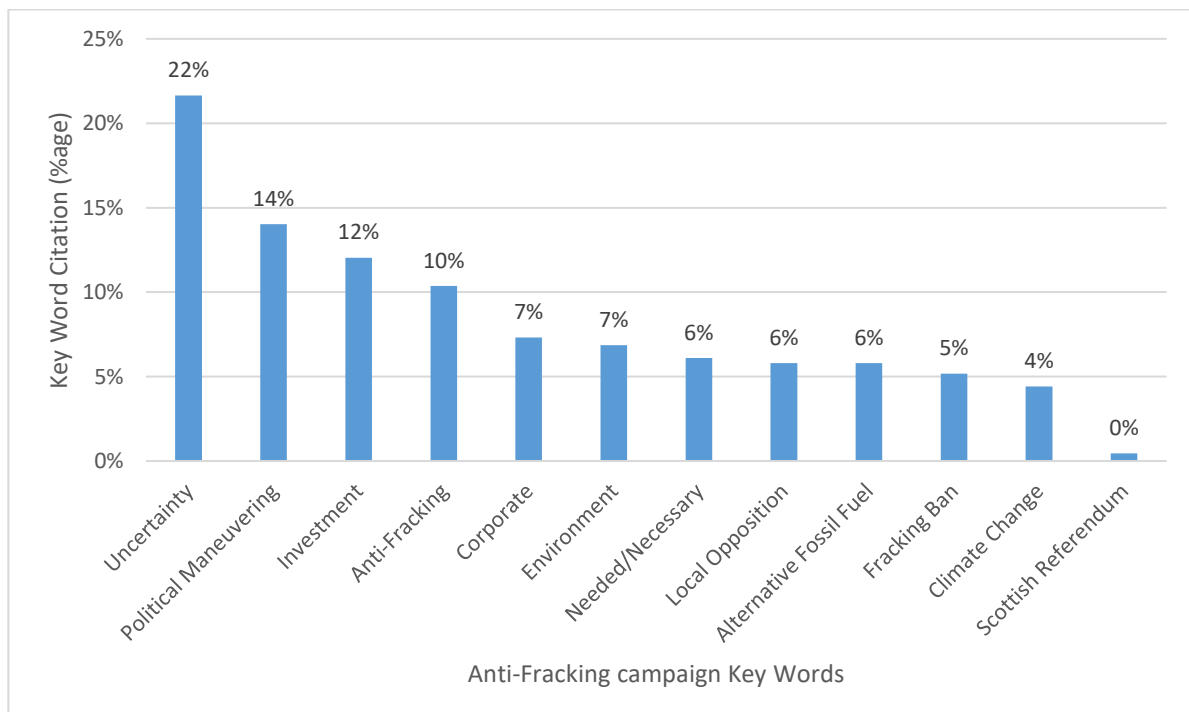
However, the perceived threat to personal property and overall safety of shale gas extraction characterised the main arguments of groups such as “Frack Off” and was used to justify limiting or banning the process entirely. The secondary theme was more complex, and focused on the campaign as a political battle between David Cameron and the SNP, as each sought to gain leverage on the topic in the run up to the Scottish Referendum 2014, often to the detriment of the discussion surrounding the viability or popularity of the energy source.

*Table 4.4: Themes identified in the content analysis of articles about the Anti-Fracking campaign*

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Articles in which this is a Primary Theme (%)</i>	<i>Articles in which this is a Secondary Theme (%)</i>
Fracking Ban	This theme focused on the discussion surrounding the viability of shale gas extraction in the North of England and Scotland.	60%	15%
Investment Uncertainty/The Economy	The Investment theme focuses primarily on the potential of shale gas to compete with other fossil fuels and provide the United Kingdom an opportunity to challenge large oil companies such as Ineos Energy.	20%	23%
Political Manoeuvring	The viability and purpose of shale gas extraction is avoided in this theme. Instead the discussion focuses on the challenges the Conservative party are having with regards to both Labour and the SNP over legislation in the run up to the British General Election.	5%	23%
Public Consultation	The Public Consultation theme aims to provide some discussion of the national populations opinions towards shale gas extraction. Reference is made to home-owners both north and south of the Scottish border and the concerns they have relating to safety.	3%	10%
Other	This theme is designed to address any remaining topics that were not covered by the other four themes. This theme here largely concerns the testimony of Professor Younger in relation to the safety of shale gas extraction, though some reference is made to the Scottish Referendum.	8%	23%

As with each of the previous cases, “Uncertainty” is a dominant term utilised with considerable frequency, accounting for almost 25% of the overall assessed terms (See *Figure 4.4*). Much of this uncertainty is directed towards the challenge natural gas may pose to the existing oil industry, but can also be seen in relation to supposed risks and overall safety of the practice. In fact, one of the tertiary themes in the coverage centres on the testimony of Professor Younger over the misrepresentation of risk by pressure groups, exemplifying the Anti-Fracking position. The second most frequent citation surrounds the idea of “Political Manoeuvring” which is illustrated in its position as the most dominant secondary theme across the coverage overall. Beyond that, words associated with foreign investment and economic concerns become more dominant with “Investment”, “Corporate” and “Alternative Fossil Fuel”, occupying almost a third of the remaining count. Given the frequency of terms like “Environment” which is used in multiple discussions within the overall narrative, it can be difficult to assess its relative importance. However, when taken in conjunction with terms such as “Climate Change”, “Local Opposition” and “Anti-Fracking” itself, it becomes clear that Anti-Fracking lobby groups have made some progress in the national debate, despite strong opposition both in government and internationally.

*Figure 4.4: Anti-Fracking campaign Word Frequencies*



For the most part, the coverage of the Anti-Fracking campaign relied on the sources derived from political parties (27% of articles cited political parties as primary sources), supplemented by references to international organisations (13%) interested in the financial opportunity offered by shale gas and the extent to which it could challenge large oil companies such as Ineos Energy. Interestingly, little reference was made to the political ramifications of the campaign within these sources. As with the sources cited, the primary power foci were international business organisations and to a lesser extent, the politicians involved in the debate. This is shown by the emphasis on international businesses such as Ineos Energy and British Petroleum which were far more prominent than George Osborne, David Cameron and Tom Greatrex. There were minor references to community lead initiatives within the sampled articles, but these were largely used to facilitate particular political positions rather than representing a tertiary voice. In addition, young people saw no direct citation, with most citizen voices coming from those aged 35+ (though often higher). A possible reason for favouring this age demographic could be based on the assumption that a greater majority of those aged 35+ are more likely to be homeowners or leaseholders. Therefore, fracking practices are of particular interest to them, given the potential threat posed to their property.

#### **4.7: Bringing the cases together: Building a typological map of legacy media coverage**

The selection and exploration of these four cases was designed to provide context for the findings of *Chapter 5, 6 and 7*. The selected cases covered four political events, encompassing both constitutional and non-constitutional forms of engagement; all of which could be deemed relevant to an exploration of youth political engagement more widely. Considering Copeland's (2013) and McIntyre's (2012) assertion that young people are engaging with politics in new and sometimes divergent ways, an assessment of the coverage of both constitution and non-constitutional engagement is vital; simply because of the potential of this coverage to impact individual agency and perceptions of political efficacy (Donson, Chesters, Welsh & Tickle, 2004). With this in mind, there were several key results that arose from the content analysis. The first result suggested that in the coverage of Occupy: Parliament Square and the Anti-Fracking campaign, there was a distinct focus on "illicit" activities, though this was most apparent in the articles covering Occupy: Parliament Square. However, this focus on illicit activities was also present in the articles relating to the Anti-Fracking campaign; most notably those concerning the testimony of Professor Younger. The stories concerning these events illustrate how the behaviour of those involved can be re-appropriated or re-contextualised to fit the dominant ideology. The confiscation of items such as pizza boxes and umbrellas during the Occupy demonstration (due to their classification as sleeping equipment or structures by

the police under the *2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act*; Home Office, 2011) illustrates this point. The emphasis placed on the seizure of this “illegal” sleeping equipment during the coverage of the event generates a criminal frame, whereby the demonstrators are directly challenging the status quo. The behaviour of the press here is not unique and is demonstrated by Donson et al., (2004) in their work on the anti-capitalist protests in Prague. Furthermore, the shift in frame obfuscates the original purpose of the demonstration and ascribes criminality to inherently non-criminal behaviours. The use of frames in this manner supports the work of both Herman and Chomsky (1988) and Leets (2000).

The second result from the content analysis demonstrated that reporting on both the British General Election and the Scottish Referendum was notably more detailed (though focused heavily on the maintenance of the status quo; Althusser, 2014) than that of the non-constitutional cases. However, it could be argued that conflict inherent in the coverage was generated in a similar manner to that of the Anti-Fracking campaign - by focusing on the inability of key politicians (like David Cameron) to reconcile significant policy issues (such as EU membership or shale gas extraction) with their own political desires. Furthermore, the disparity between who is referred to directly and who is referred to indirectly or neglected (i.e. British youth), is common to both constitutional and non-constitutional cases. That being said, this disparity is most apparent in the non-constitutional cases, whereby homeowners and older members of the electorate are central to the debate and British young people are neglected on topics that may well affect their future. This represents a significant focal point within the discussion contained firstly in *Chapter 5* and secondly in *Chapter 6*. In *Chapter 5*, the disparity in coverage is compared across platforms, through a direct comparison of social and legacy media coverage. In *Chapter 6*, the impact of this disparity in coverage is addressed in relation to individual experiences of the events and how that is considered to have affected the sampled individual’s personal efficacy. With this disparity in coverage in mind, Mycock and Tonge (2012) highlight how:

Political parties in the UK have... been historically reluctant to engage with young people or represent their interests in the formulation of policies, instead prioritising older voters.  
(p.138)

These differences in coverage are explored more fully in *Chapters 5* and *6*. *Chapter 5* provides a direct comparison for legacy media reporting with coverage of the same event on social media. However, *Chapter 6* addresses the impact of these differences as perceived by four individuals whose testimonies draw on their own experiences of politics and their involvement with both legacy and

social media. Overall, the exploration undertaken in this chapter serves to contextualise the findings of all remaining methodological chapters, highlighting important moments within the narrative of each case.

## **Chapter 5: Exploring Twitter and legacy media coverage of two political events**

The following chapter seeks to explore the differences in how Twitter and legacy media cover constitutional and non-constitutional political events. The investigation undertaken here focuses on exploring two specific case studies, that of the British General Election 2015 and Occupy: Parliament Square 2014. *Section 5.1* outlines differences between the two media formats, broadly covering the rise of social media as news aggregators and the impact they have had on non-constitutional engagement. The remainder of *Section 5.1* illustrates how the trends present within the sampled events relate to young people's attitudes, feelings and beliefs towards political engagement. *Section 5.2* outlines the process by which the data was obtained and analysed, highlighting the computer-mediated techniques adapted from the work of Lewis, Zamith and Hermida (2013). The results of these processes are presented in *Section 5.3*, where they take the form of word frequency tables, hierarchical cluster analysis and co-occurrence networks. In *Section 5.4*, the findings of the chapter are integrated with the wider literature, in order to facilitate a more extensive exploration of the similarities and differences between legacy and social media coverage of current events. The findings of this chapter and those that follow are compiled in *Chapter 8*, where they are applied within the context of the three research questions to explore the impact of media on young people's attitudes, feelings and beliefs towards political engagement.

### **5.1: Outlining the role of social and legacy media in the coverage of political events**

As outlined in *Section 1.1*, this thesis is positioned within the field of media psychology and written in accordance with APA (American Psychological Association) writing conventions. As such, the following section (and similar sections in *Chapters 6* and *7*) represents a short introduction to the literature and topics deemed relevant to the analysis at hand, with reference being made back to the main literature review in *Chapter 2* where appropriate.

The work conducted by Papacharissi (2010) and Howard (2011) emphasises the role of blogs and microblogs as news disseminators when mainstream news media is restricted or blocked. They draw attention specifically to Twitter's role in facilitating the dissemination of news during the unrest in the Middle East. While only limited comparisons can be drawn between the role of social media in the events occurring in the Arab Spring and Occupy: Parliament Square, the restricted or limited



coverage of both of these non-constitutional events by the legacy media is apparent (especially when considering the reduced sample in the Occupy: Parliament Square case as highlighted in *Section 4.2* and the findings of Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira pertaining to the Egyptian Revolution, 2012).

The assertions made by Papacharissi (2010) and Howard (2011) regarding the importance of social media in facilitating non-constitutional political events are valuable when considering the current Occupy: Parliament Square case for two main reasons. Firstly, their work on the Arab Spring uses similar methods to those employed in this chapter, making direct comparison easier; and secondly, they highlight what it is about social media that makes it unique in its ability to react to these types of political events. For both Papacharissi (2010) and Howard (2011), social media's success in facilitating non-constitutional engagement is tied to the instantaneity of its coverage and that it is less subject to censorship. What this means, is that social media can respond more quickly to events than the relatively sluggish legacy media (Papcharissi & de Fatima Oliviera, 2012), whilst avoiding the ideological imposition associated with the coverage of the agenda-setting media organisations (Althusser, 2014, Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

Work conducted within the field, such as that undertaken by Kwak, Lee, Park and Moon (2010), has suggested that Twitter feeds containing content derived from news organisations and journalists are typically a reflection of the parent organisation's values and attitudes. As such, the way in which these organisations utilise Twitter could be seen to undermine its potential, as coverage obtained from these organisations relies on the deliberate construction of stories, rather than reactive and instantaneous coverage of an event (Grusin, 2010). Farhi (2009) highlights a number of occasions in which the agenda-setting media has been unable to keep up with grass-roots reporting inherent within the social media platform (notably during the coverage of disasters, riots and political events where there is little time to assemble all of the facts before reporting, if the story is to remain relevant). Furthermore, grass-roots reporting on Twitter stands to have a significant impact on individual agency among young people, due to the perception of solidarity amongst social media users (Turkle, 2011), as well as a greater potential for mobilisation of youth groups (Theocharis, 2012).

More recently, there has been a move within the literature relating to politics and political communication to redefine what can be categorised as political participation (Copeland, 2014; Fox, 2013; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013). This move has seen a great deal of support, considering that acts of

political consumerism are on the rise (Stolle, Micheletti & Berlin, 2011) and are characterised by distinct youth involvement (Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 2005; Ward & de Vreese, 2011) facilitated by social media (Gustafsson, 2012; Ostman, 2012). Given the perception that “political parties in the UK have... been historically reluctant to engage with young people or represent their interests in the formulation of policies, instead prioritising older voters.” (Mycock & Tonge, 2012; p.138), this is unsurprising. Some have argued that the London Riots in 2011 were the result of an outpouring of political angst brought about by this lack of engagement, though there are many who disagree (Khan, 2011; Williams, 2011), suggesting that the cause of the unrest was brought about by an “age of rampant consumerism”. Despite condemnation by political commentators and various politicians, the rise in non-constitutional engagement as a form of political agency is in many ways expected. This is based on the assessment made by CIVICUS (using their Enabling Environment Index; CIVICUS: Enabling Environment Index Project Team, 2013) which suggests that the UK displays many of the criteria required for increased civic/political engagement (high levels of education, tolerance, political freedom and socioeconomic status).

The following content analysis involves a parallel exploration of the differences in the storytelling practices of Twitter and the British legacy media on the topics of Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 and The British General Election 2015 with aim of contributing to the discussion of political agency in the British context. This was achieved by collecting salient hashtags and keywords associated with those topics both of which were covered in the articles sampled in *Chapter 4*. Taking into account the findings of the wider literature, it is expected that Twitter will be more diverse in its coverage than legacy media, as well as helping to facilitate ongoing political engagement (both constitutional and non-constitutional), by offering a variety of perspectives (Jenkins, Li, Kauskopf & Green, 2009). Copeland (2014) and Gil de Zúñiga, Copeland and Bimber (2014) suggest that greater mobilisation would be expected in non-constitutional settings, given the shift from traditional forms of engagement to more individualised political action.

## **5.2: Mixed method approaches to sampling: Defining the process of analysis**

The content analysis discussed in this chapter examined the news values, form and content present within the coverage of two case studies selected from Twitter and the British legacy media. The first case study concerned the British General Election in 2015; data for which were collected over the period between the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2015 and the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2015 (encompassing the two week run

up to Election Day on the 7<sup>th</sup> of May and the following week after). The second case explored the coverage of the Occupy demonstrations at Parliament Square that took place between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of October 2014. Originally the data collection period for the Occupy case was designed to match that of the British General Election (two weeks prior to the event and one week post event). However, due to poor returns, data collection for the Occupy case was expanded to include coverage obtained between the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2014 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2015.

#### *Data acquisition and file preparation*

The Twitter sample focused primarily on a series of Hashtags, search terms and users associated with the British General Election and the Occupy demonstrations (@UKELECTIONS2015, #ge2015, #GE15, #election2015, General AND Election, British AND General AND Election, #occupylondon, #occupyparlamentsquare, #occupydemocracy, Occupy AND Democracy, Occupy AND Parliament AND Square) in concert with a series of search terms tied to the events. These tags were most prominent during the coverage, but also featured in tweets cross-posted to other frequently used tags. Archives of tweets between the target dates were generated using an online GoogleDoc designed to capture and archive tweets in a manner more extensive than the Twitter API (Hawksey, 2012). The tweets archived in this manner contained the content of each tweet, including Hashtags, date and time stamps, as well as a variety of backend API information relating to user-setting preferences. Usernames were also included, but were removed from the file prior to analysis in order to maintain anonymity. A series of filters were applied to the raw data in order to reduce the sample size, excluding duplicate posts with the aim of reducing issues of noise and inconsistencies within the archiving process. Over the periods identified, a total of 13,005 tweets were obtained for Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 and 72,264 tweets for the British General Election 2015.

The sampled news articles from British legacy media were obtained using LexisNexis (an online archive for various publications) and constituted 40 articles. These samples were selected from national broadsheet newspapers, due to their role as agenda setters. The sampled news articles were retained from *Chapter 4*, as such, the same restrictions relating to the coverage of Occupy: Parliament Square remain. For further details relating to the sampling of the legacy media articles, refer to *Section 4.2*.

### *Sampling and Analysis Strategies*

A frequency analysis was conducted on both the archived tweets and the selected articles relating to each case using KH Coder, an open source software program (Higuchi, 2015). On completion of basic descriptive statistical analysis, computerised content analysis techniques were applied using the same open source software. The primary analysis of both samples centred on the generation of co-occurrence networks, in addition to hierarchical clusters in a manner akin to those employed by Osgood (1959) and Danowski (1993). The combination of these networks and qualitative clusters allowed for the assessment of co-occurring words, based on the top 100 weighted scores according to a Jaccard Coefficient (Romesburg, 1984), as well as the identification of key aspects of coverage within the sampled texts. The layout for each of these nodes were set up using the framework developed by Fruchterman and Reingold (1991), allowing for a direct comparison between the various nodes in the network by way of their proximity to one another and relative size. As covered in *Section 3.2*, the use of co-occurrence networks allows for the identification of the authors intent. The interpretation of these co-occurrence networks represented a qualitative endeavour intended to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the discourse contained within the sampled tweets and selected articles. Throughout this process, both data files were extensively read in order to maintain intellectual rigour and facilitate a later discussion of the similarities and differences in parlance and style between the two formats in *Section 5.5*. The application of both quantitative computerised methods (used to generate co-occurrence networks and hierarchical clusters) and qualitative approaches (used to interpret those networks) sought to expand validity and reliability (Lewis, Zamith & Hermida, 2013).

### **5.3: Computer-mediated analysis of the coverage of the General Election 2015**

The findings of the computer-mediated content analysis of data collected about the General Election 2015 are discussed in the following section and relate to word frequency, hierarchical cluster analysis and co-occurrence networks.

#### *Word Frequency Analysis*

##### *Twitter*

*Table 5.1* outlines the 20 most significant terms present within the 72,260 tweets obtained between April 1<sup>st</sup> 2015 and May 14<sup>th</sup> 2015 and includes both pre-election coverage and one week of post-election coverage. The word frequency analysis removed connectives and identified key nouns

(denoting topics) and verbs (denoting actions) relevant to the coverage overall. A number of significant Hashtags (#registertovote, #ge2015 and #workingforwales) were also identified, though they are not represented in the top 20 overall frequencies. In the 20 most cited words, “General” and “Election” represent the most frequently cited terms (58,190 combined); when considering the topic of conversation, this is unsurprising. The high number of “vote” citations (12,766) supports the narrative that the majority of the discussions held on Twitter focus around facilitating the vote. These key terms along with reference to the two main parties, “Labour” (2,765) and “Conservatives” (2,731), as well as the “SNP” (4,152) contextualise the coverage by illustrating dominant themes, whilst highlighting the important players. However, citations relating to important issues at the time such as the ongoing recession, as illustrated by references to “Bankers” (655) and concerns relating to EU membership, as shown by the number of “Europe” citations (902), is low and do not even enter into the top 20 frequencies. This is similarly the case for the emotive language associated with social media, such as “Drown” (768) or “Worst” (863). Overall, the neglect of topical discussions and emotive language reiterates the point made previously in which the Twitter discourse appears to focus on facilitating a vote, rather than discussing the contemporary issues tied to the vote.

*Table 5.1: 20 most frequent terms in sampled Twitter coverage of the General Elections 2015*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>
1	Election	31,605	11	Result	2,814
2	General	26,585	12	Game	2,767
3	Vote	12,766	13	Labour	2,765
4	UK	5,804	14	Conservative	2,731
5	SNP	4,152	15	Candidate	2,605
6	Party	3,887	16	Hung	2,563
7	Register	3,284	17	Win	2,497
8	Decide	3,266	18	Need	2,473
9	Say	3,150	19	Government	2,447
10	Poll	3,068	20	Policy	1,891

### *Legacy media*

The following Table (Table 5.2) outlines the 20 most frequently cited terms present within the sampled British legacy media articles. As before, the sample focuses on the dates between April 1st 2015 and May 14th 2015 and includes both pre-election coverage and limited post-election coverage. In the 20 most cited words, “Labour” accounts for the most frequently cited term (251), most likely due to their role as opposition in the election which is supported by the citation of the “SNP” as the fourth most frequently cited term (193) and “Miliband” at eighth (106). The importance of “Scotland” (495) in the electoral campaigns is apparent, given the result of the earlier Scottish referendum in 2014; as such it appears here around the mid-point. This mid-point represents an interesting point in the coverage, as it highlights the fractured nature of the legacy media, as illustrated in the later analysis. Furthermore, outside of “Scotland” and “Tax” (86) there are no significant references to actual policy. The top 20 terms present in the Twitter coverage mirror these citations, though do so with greater focus on policy and mobilization; the mirrored coverage is both predicted and demonstrated by Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012).

*Table 5.2: 20 most frequent terms in sampled legacy media coverage of the General Elections 2015*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>
1	Labour	251	11	Win	86
2	General Election	227	12	Sturgeon	85
3	Party	215	13	Leader	76
4	SNP	163	14	Campaign	75
5	Vote	145	15	Voter	65
6	People	143	16	Political	61
7	Cameron	110	17	Scottish	60
8	Miliband	106	18	Tories	57
9	Scotland	95	19	Britain	54
10	Tax	86	20	UKIP	52

## *Qualitative Assessment of the General Election Coverage*

### *Twitter*

The qualitative assessment of the Twitter and legacy media coverage of the British General election was completed using a synthesis of hierarchical cluster analysis and the generation of co-occurrence networks. In order to maintain the integrity of the respective sources the Twitter and legacy media data was explored separately with both following the same basic approach to the analysis. This parallel method of assessment is drawn together in *Section 5.5* where potential similarities in story selection and coverage are elaborated upon. The Twitter sample concerning the General Election 2015 consisted of 72,260 Tweets and was archived utilising Twitter's built in API system using search parameters derived from salient Hashtags, such as "#ge2015", "#GE15" and "#election2015", in addition to key search terms. The hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted using Ward's method and produced four clusters (see *Table 5.3*), with variables significantly different between each. The first cluster is predominantly concerned with the potential of a hung parliament and urges those online to "decide" and take part in the "game". The second cluster concerns a push for conservative support and is driven by the Hashtag "#workingforwales". The third cluster encourages knowledge acquisition behaviour using key terms such as "fact" and "know". Furthermore, *The Guardian* and the hashtag "#registertovote" are key contributors to this third cluster. The fourth and final cluster was the most extensive, focusing on significant acts of policy and major actors within the electoral campaigns as well as the context surrounding key concerns such as "Scotland", the "SNP", "Independence" and voter polls. Despite the frequent citation of "Labour" in the word frequencies above, it did not appear to be significant enough to warrant a cluster of its own here. This could be attributed to the Labour party's role as an illustrative point in these clusters. For example, in the context of Cluster 2, reference is made to the Labour party in order to demonstrate the strength of Conservative support.

The clusters identified here see some replication in *Figure 5.1*, a co-occurrence network constructed from the key words sourced from the Twitter data. When presented, the colour of the node indicates the presence of a dominant theme and the proximity of the nodes to one another indicates how similar they are (closeness indicating greater similarity). Like *Table 5.3*, *Figure 5.1* illustrates that the Twitter coverage of the 2015 General Election was diverse, with no clear overarching themes or centres of discussion. The lack of narrative clarity could be attributed to the presence of agenda-setting organisations and other groups who, rather than discussing the topic on

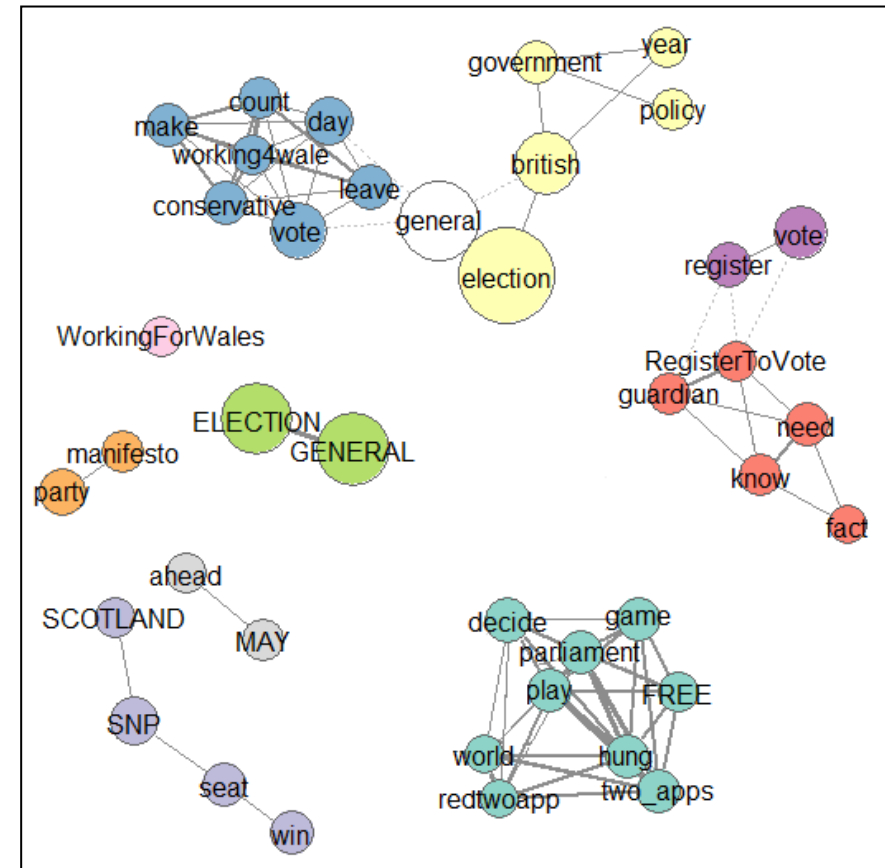
Twitter itself, seek to drive traffic to their own dedicated sites, though the SNP's success at winning new seats is acknowledged, if only superficially. This makes an accurate assessment of diversity on the platform difficult. That being said, there are still distinct topics which- to some degree- do overlap with the clusters identified previously in the hierarchical analysis; namely *The Guardian's* involvement with “#registertovote”, as well as the Conservative movement tied to “#workingforwales”. The other clusters identified previously are less clear here, suggesting that they are somewhat fractured and independent in terms of co-occurrence weightings. This demonstrates limited betweenness centrality, as identified by the Jaccard coefficient.



Table 5.3: Clusters identified in the sampled Twitter coverage of the General Elections 2015

Clusters	Description	Cluster Characteristics
<i>Cluster 1 - Electoral Predictions</i>	This cluster attempted to predict the outcome of the election, whilst urging users to take part in voting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emphasis on uncertainty</li> <li>- Prediction of hung Parliament</li> <li>- Politics as a game</li> </ul>
<i>Cluster 2 - Conservative Support</i>	This cluster focused on support for the Conservative party.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- #workingforwales</li> <li>- Necessity of making ones vote count by voting Conservative</li> <li>- Labour opposition</li> </ul>
<i>Cluster 3 - Knowledge Seeking</i>	This cluster emphasised the importance of knowledge acquisition behaviour as well as the need to register to vote.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- #registertovote</li> <li>- Presence of terms such as “fact” and “know”</li> <li>- <i>The Guardian</i></li> </ul>
<i>Cluster 4 - Policy</i>	This cluster was the most extensive, it covered a broad range of topics ranging from Scottish independence to UKIP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Citation of “Policy”, “Government” and Polling information</li> <li>- Reference to the “SNP” and Scottish Independence</li> <li>- Coverage of party manifestos</li> </ul>

Figure 5.1: Co-occurrence network detailing highly associated terms in the sampled Twitter coverage of the General Elections 2015



### *Legacy media*

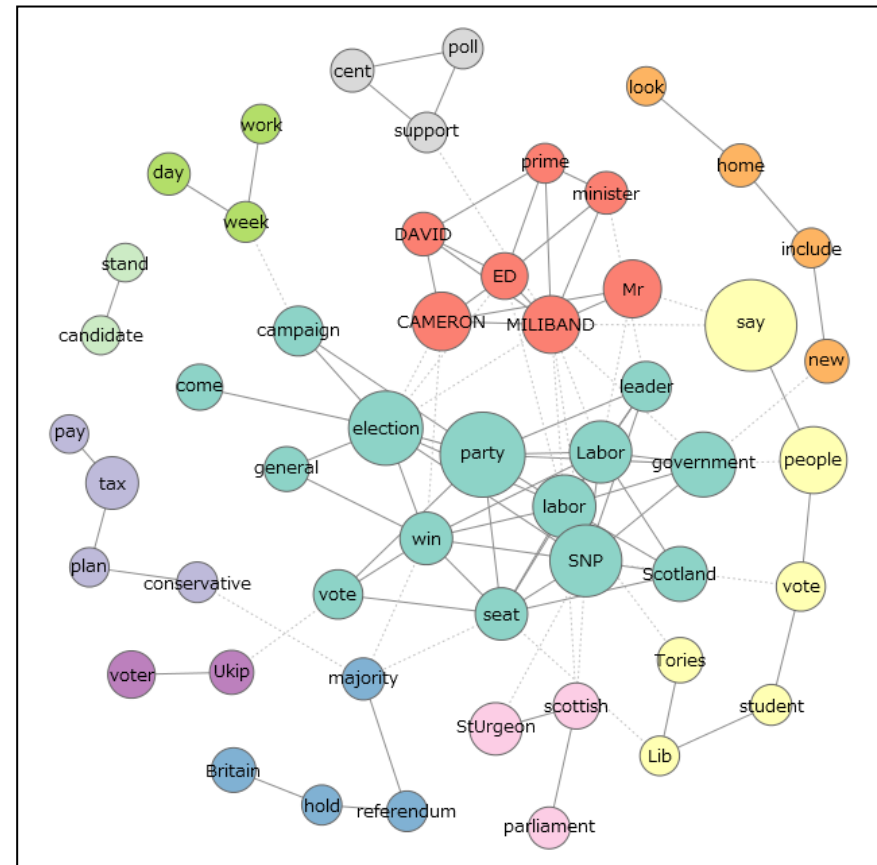
As before, a hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted on a sample of articles obtained about the British General Election. The analysis, conducted using Ward's method, produced three main clusters (See *Table 5.4*). Additional minor clusters were also identified, though they were not expansive enough to warrant inclusion. Each identified cluster contained significantly different variables which were used to distinguish the important aspects of coverage. The first cluster focused on the importance of the election to the people and concentrated primarily on tax concerns and the ramifications of a potential new budget. The focus on policy is not seen in either of the other two clusters, making it unique. The emphasis on policy here differs from that of the coverage on social media discussed above, considering that the Twitter coverage tended to emphasise the importance of mobilisation and participation over the significance of the vote itself. The second cluster focuses on the support for Labour and the SNP, making reference to both Nicola Sturgeon and Ed Miliband. The final cluster focuses on the success of UKIP and the threat they posed to the Conservative party. Nigel Farage is an important facet of this discussion, given his role as party leader. Furthermore, the third cluster also highlights the infighting between the political parties themselves, echoing the findings of Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs (2001). Baumeister et al. argue that there is a heavy emphasis placed on negative stories within the legacy media- in particular negative coverage of political figures and parties (Kahn, n.d.; Lloyd, 2004).

Building on the clusters identified *Table 5.4*, *Figure 5.2* presents the relationships between key words in the legacy media coverage as a co-occurrence network. From the network, a number of distinct topics can be seen, many of which overlap with the clusters identified previously in the hierarchical analysis. The most notable of these is the association between Labour and the SNP. The co-occurrence network highlights the importance of "Scotland" to the election campaign, in a manner similar to the findings of the initial word frequency. This assessment is based on its central position within the network and the series of links that branch out to a number of other nodal points. The other clusters identified previously are less obvious, suggesting that they are somewhat fractured, though highly interrelated in terms of co-occurrence weightings. This is demonstrated by limited betweenness centrality, determined by the Jaccard coefficient; in visual terms, this can be seen in the numerous dashed connections. The difference between the two networks presented in *Figures 5.1* and *5.2* on the point of betweenness, suggests more convoluted coverage of salient events in the legacy media, as opposed to the Twitter coverage in which the topics are more distinct (perhaps due to the character limit inherent in the format).

Table 5.4: Clusters identified in the sampled legacy media coverage of the General Elections 2015

Clusters	Description	Cluster Characteristics
<i>Cluster 1 - Electoral Importance</i>	This cluster focused on how the upcoming election was important, focusing primarily on austerity and the upcoming budget announcement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Heavy emphasis placed on "Tax" as a facet of "Policy"</li> <li>- Citation of "Britain" and the "UK" reinforce the importance of this national event</li> <li>- Necessity of voting highlighted</li> </ul>
<i>Cluster 2 - Labour and the SNP</i>	This cluster addressed both Labour and the SNP more directly, and called for a strong leader, this cluster saw some support from one of the smaller clusters which focused on the role of the SNP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The need for strong leadership</li> <li>- Reference to Ed Miliband and Nicola Sturgeon</li> <li>- The role of Labour and the SNP as opponents</li> </ul>
<i>Cluster 3 - The threat posed by UKIP</i>	This cluster focused on the threat UKIP posed to the Conservative party, though emphasised the role of Nigel Farage. To a lesser extent this clustered illustrated the infighting going on amongst all parties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nigel Farage and UKIP</li> <li>- Conservative majority</li> <li>- Prediction of a Conservative victory</li> </ul>

Figure 5.2: Co-occurrence network detailing highly associated terms in the sampled legacy media coverage of the General Elections 2015



## 5.4: Computer-mediated analysis of the coverage of the Occupy: Parliament Square 2014

### *Word frequency analysis*

As with the General Election 2015, the findings of the computer-mediated content analysis of data collected about the Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 demonstration are discussed in the following section and relate to word frequency, hierarchical cluster analysis and co-occurrence networks.

### *Twitter*

*Table 5.5* outlines the 20 most significant terms present within the 13,005 tweets obtained between June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015 over the period in which the Occupy: Parliament Square was underway, as well as pre-event and post-event coverage. The word frequency analysis removed connectives and identified significant nouns (denoting topics) and verbs (denoting actions) relevant to the coverage overall. As *Table 5.3* illustrates, the 20 most frequent terms in the Twitter coverage were varied, reflecting different positions and views about the demonstration. There is reference to the intended purpose of the demonstration- an attempt to reclaim the democratic process as shown by the citation of “Democracy” (3,090). However, there are also a number of terms that can be associated with criminality, these being “Police” (2,382), “Protest” (1,424) and “Arrest” (1,485). More affective language is also seen through the appearance of “Prevail” (555) and “Just” (428). There are some distinct differences between the frequencies obtained from the Occupy event and the British General Election. These differences may be due to sample size, but it can be argued that based on the overall sample, there is a greater concentration of key terms within the Occupy case (certainly with regards to covering the intended purpose of the demonstration), without reference to the URL’s as seen in *Figure 5.1*. In addition, there is a greater presence of Hashtags and user accounts in the Occupy sample, notably “@RustyRockets” (Russell Brands Twitter alias), “#OccupyDemocracy” and “#OccupyLondon”. These hashtags and user accounts firstly emphasise the presence of single issue groups on the platform and secondly reinforce the notion set out by Park, Lim & Park (2015) relating to the importance of key actors in facilitating the debate.

Table 5.5: 20 most frequent terms in the sampled Twitter coverage of the Occupy: Parliament Square demonstration 2014

Rank	Terms	Count	Rank	Terms	Count
1	Parliament	10,050	11	Newsworthy	984
2	Square	9,456	12	Consider	973
3	#OccupyDemocracy	6,652	13	<i>The Guardian</i>	947
4	#OccupyLondon	5,382	14	Support	535
5	Occupy	4,471	15	Prevail	555
6	Democracy	3,090	16	Join	433
7	Police	2,382	17	Just	428
8	Protester	1,975	18	@GreenJennyJones	397
9	Arrest	1,485	19	@RustyRockets	356
10	Protest	1,424	20	#TarpaulinRevolution	332

### Legacy media

Table 5.6 outlines the 20 most prominent terms from the sampled articles obtained between June 13<sup>th</sup> 2014 and January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015 over the period in which the Occupy: Parliament Square demonstration was underway, as well as pre-event and post-event coverage. As can be seen in the table, there is a greater emphasis placed on terms such as “Protest” (42) and “Arrest” (17) in the coverage provided by the British legacy media, reiterating the findings of Baumeister et al. (2001), Kahn (n.d.) and Lloyd (2004), who argue there is a heavy emphasis placed on negative news coverage. However, it could also be maintained that the reduced coverage of the event could be attributed to the event being organised by non-establishment figures and actors and that the event aimed to challenge the political and social status quo. Many of the instances of arrests were concerned with the removal of pizza boxes and umbrellas under the “2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act” (Home Office, 2011). While “Arrest” (17) appears within Table 5.6, there is little to no reference to the act which drove those arrests. However within the 20 most prominent terms, the “2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act” is alluded to by the citation of “Sleep” (14) and “Tent” (27).

There are two notable differences between the frequency statistics of the Twitter and legacy media coverage. Firstly, the positioning of “Protest” (42) and “Arrest” (17) over terms like “Peaceful” (12) illustrates the tendency of legacy media to rely more heavily on conflict-orientated messages. The second difference is that social media retains a greater degree of diversity in sources when dealing with non-constitutional events.

*Table 5.6: 20 most frequent terms in the sampled legacy media coverage of the Occupy: Parliament Square demonstration 2014*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>
1	Protest	42	11	Arrest	17
2	Square	40	12	Group	14
3	Parliament	32	13	Sleep	14
4	Protester	29	14	Student	14
5	Police	28	15	Space	13
6	Tent	27	16	Area	12
7	London	23	17	Peaceful	12
8	People	23	18	Activity	10
9	Occupy	21	19	GLA	10
10	Power	18	20	Movement	10

### *Qualitative Assessment of the Occupy: Parliament Square Coverage*

#### *Twitter*

As with the General Election, the exploration of coverage surround the Occupy: Parliament Square demonstration was completed using a synthesis of hierarchical cluster analysis and the generation of co-occurrence networks. The sample consisted of 13,005 tweets and as before was archived using Twitters built-in API system using search parameters derived from salient Hashtags such as “#occupylondon”, “#occupyparlamentsquare” and “#occupydemocracy”, in addition to key

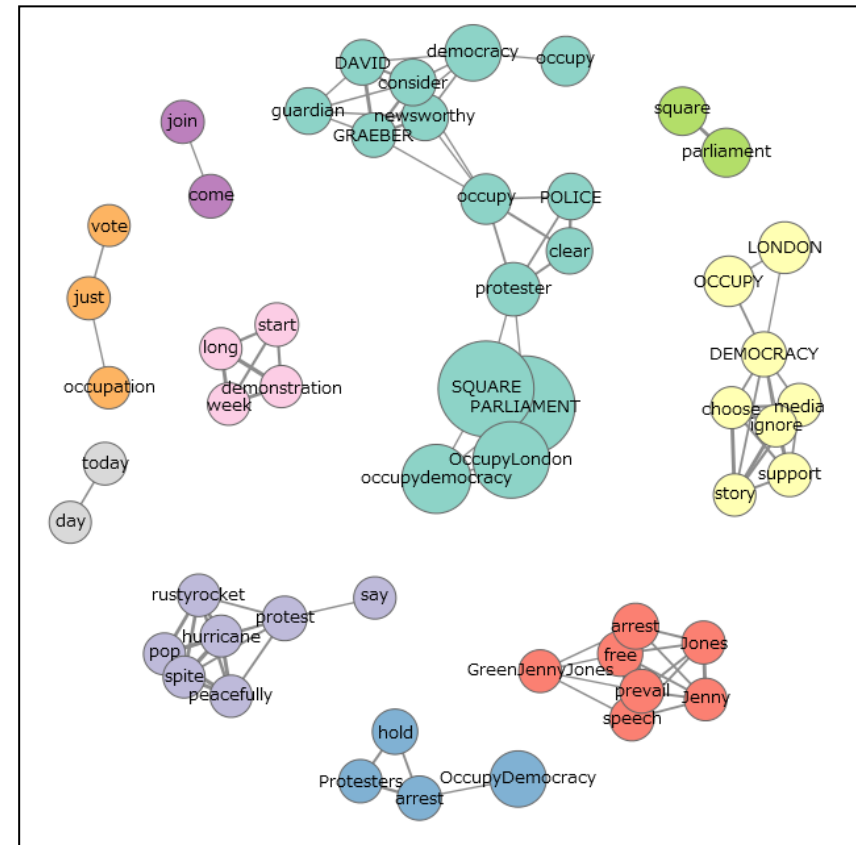
search terms tied to the event itself. The analysis utilised Ward's method and generated three clusters (See *Table 5.7*), semantically linked and significantly different from one another. The first cluster emphasised named support, highlighting the role of @RustyRockets (Russell Brand), Jenny Jones of the Green Party and touched on the involvement of David Graeber (a political activist). This cluster was epitomised by the use of highly emotive language, such as "hurricane", "spite" and "protest" in conjunction with notable instances that occurred during the event itself, such as "arrests". In addition, there was also a distinct emphasis on the role of "free speech". The second cluster concerns police involvement, the nature of the protest and how the demonstration is understood within the Occupy community. The final cluster is the most extensive and contextualises the event in terms of a digital footprint. There are repeated mentions of salient hashtags such as #TarpaulinRevolution as well as an "urgent" need for "freedom", supplemented by *The Guardian's* call for more representative media coverage. When compared to the coverage of the General Election, the identified clusters do not tend to represent dominant conceptions of involvement and in many ways seek to foster continued non-constitutional engagement. The coverage often diverges from traditional media stylings that emphasise a more detached approach, instead favouring emotive and empowering language such as "freedom", "revolution" and "free speech" (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012).

Illustrating some of clusters identified as part of the hierarchical cluster analysis the co-occurrence network provided in *Figure 5.3* provides a visual representation of the Occupy demonstration. Several of the clusters depicted in *Figure 5.3* overlap with the legacy media coverage, particularly those focusing on David Graeber and Jenny Jones. However, there are a number of other clusters that focus on unique Twitter conceptions of the event in question; these emphasise the concept of peaceful protests, police involvement and belief that the event was poorly supported by the national press and largely ignored. The lack of dashed lines suggest each cluster is highly unique and non-related, meaning that the coverage online is fragmented, with no links drawn between each aspect of the event. That being said- despite the limited cross-over- the three key actors, @RustyRockets (Russell Brand), Jenny Jones and David Graeber feature heavily in some of the larger nodes emphasising their respective roles and visually illustrating Park et al.'s (2015) notion of a hub and spoke network, in which key actors facilitate the debate at large.

Table 5.7: Clusters identified in the sampled Twitter coverage of the Occupy: Parliament Square demonstration 2014

Clusters	Description	Cluster Characteristics
<i>Cluster 1 - Personality</i>	This cluster highlighted the various individuals supporting the event either through attendance or by facilitating the coverage of event online.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Key individuals – Russell Brand (@RustyRockets), Jenny Jones (Green Party) and David Graeber</li> <li>- Reliance on emotive language “Spite” and “Protest”</li> <li>- Emphasis on “Free Speech”</li> </ul>
<i>Cluster 2 - Police Involvement</i>	This cluster addressed how police involvement was seen by the Occupy community and other commentators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reference to “Arrests”</li> <li>- Emphasis on criminality</li> </ul>
<i>Cluster 3 - Digital Footprint</i>	This cluster covered the breadth of sources addressed in the coverage and their stance on the demonstration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- #TarpaulinRevolution</li> <li>- <i>The Guardian’s</i> call for representative media coverage</li> <li>- Reclamation of “Democracy”</li> </ul>

Figure 5.3: Co-occurrence network detailing highly associated terms in the sampled Twitter coverage of the Occupy: Parliament Square demonstrations 2015





### *Legacy media*

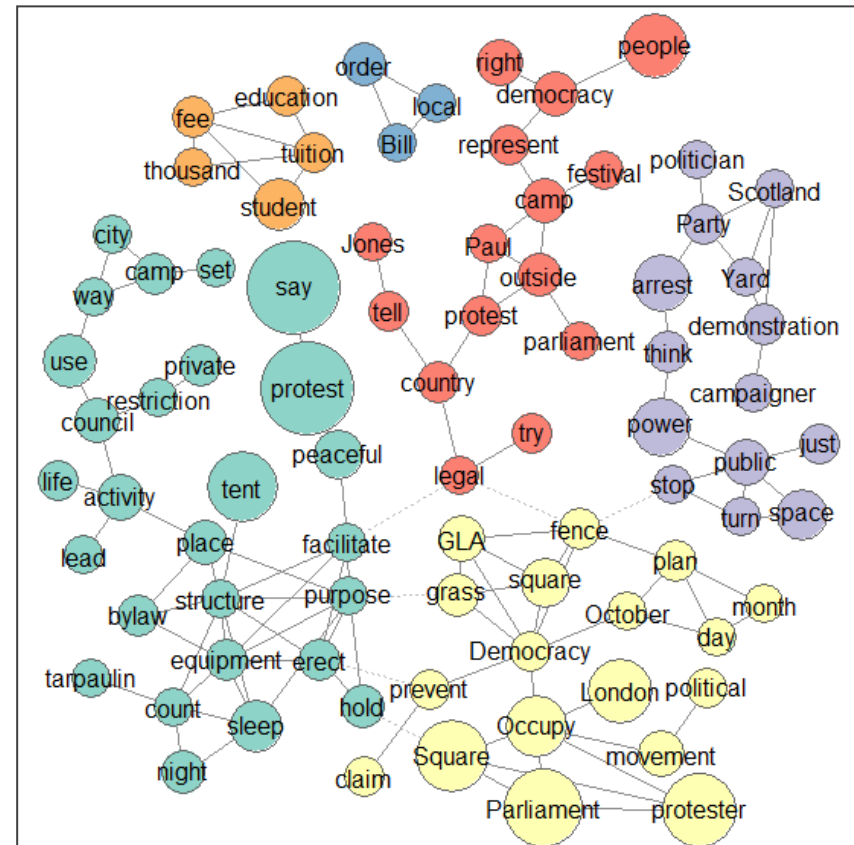
Similar to the Twitter data the legacy media articles relating to Occupy: Parliament Square were obtained between June 13<sup>th</sup> 2014 and January 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015. The analysis- conducted utilising Ward's method generated three clusters. The first cluster dealt with the location and perceived purpose of the demonstration, whilst providing a limited overview of the demonstration as a whole. The cluster referred to those taking part as protesters and focused on describing the event in terms of a festival atmosphere rather than an explicitly "political" demonstration. The second cluster focused on the "2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act" and emphasised police involvement in the event, highlighting the number of arrests made as well as how the police conducted themselves. Key terms in this cluster are "Sleep", "Structure" and "Equipment"; mirroring the wider story in which pizza boxes and umbrellas were seized due to their potential for use as sleeping equipment. The third cluster focused upon the notion of peaceful protest, counteracting the remaining sub-clusters in which the demonstrators were termed protesters. In addition, coverage here focused more heavily on the involvement of Jenny Jones and the several arrests made in relation to the second cluster. Whilst the dominant clusters highlight the peaceful components of the demonstration, they are not representative of the wider coverage, as can be seen in the word frequencies and the following co-occurrence networks; this may be due to differences in how this aspect of the coverage was reported by the sampled papers.

Once more, the co-occurrence network depicted in *Figure 5.4* represents the relationships between key words in the legacy media coverage of the Occupy: Parliament Square demonstration. The size of "Protest" and its proximity to the centre of the network highlights that this is one of the key components of the legacy media coverage of the demonstration. This finding is in line with the other case and supports the findings of Baumeister et al. (2001) regarding the negativity associated with legacy media coverage. By comparison, "Demonstration" is located towards the edge of the figure, reiterating what was said earlier in this section regarding the avoidance of covering events aimed to challenge the political and social status quo positively. Unlike the previous Twitter network, there are fewer citations of key figures like David Graeber or @RustyRockets (Russell Brand) within the network and Jenny Jones represents only a minor node. However, Jenny Jones's affiliation with student concerns can be seen, given her node's proximity to the sub-theme of student fees. Overall, this network illustrates the convoluted message provided by the legacy media and only limited focus on the purpose of the event, particularly considering the proportion of the network devoted to the coverage of the "2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act".

Table 5.8: Clusters identified in the sampled legacy media coverage of the Occupy: Parliament Square demonstration 2014

Clusters	Description	Cluster Characteristics
<i>Cluster 1 - Defining Occupy: Parliament Square</i>	This cluster provided information relating to the location and the broad purpose of the Occupy demonstration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides location information</li> <li>- Misrepresentation of the purpose of the demonstration</li> <li>- "Protest" not "Demonstration"</li> </ul>
<i>Cluster 2 - 2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act</i>	This cluster covered how the police conducted themselves during the demonstration, highlighting the arrests of a number of individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The arrest of Jenny Jones</li> <li>- Seizure of "Pizza Boxes" and other sleeping equipment</li> </ul>
<i>Cluster 3 - Peaceful Protest</i>	This cluster provided an alternative viewpoint to the other clusters focusing on the idea of a "peaceful protest"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of "Demonstrator" or "Campaigner"</li> <li>- Citation of "Peaceful"</li> <li>- Reference to the idea of representation and democracy</li> </ul>

Figure 5.4: Co-occurrence network detailing highly associated terms in the sampled legacy media coverage the Occupy: Parliament Square demonstrations 2015



## 5.5: Discussing the Twitter and legacy media coverage of political events

The content analysis in *Chapter 5* aimed to explore how social media - in particular Twitter- and legacy media cover stories relating to constitutional and non-constitutional political events. Based on the findings of the wider literature identified in *Section 5.1*, it was expected that Twitter would be more diverse in its coverage of these events than the legacy media, offering a variety of perspectives on key moments during the selected events. The hierarchical cluster analysis and word frequency tables support this assessment, illustrating how Twitter's coverage of an event touches on the key themes identified in *Chapter 4*. Furthermore, of the methods employed, the co-occurrence networks illustrate the differences in coverage most clearly with the depiction of multiple distinct nodal groups within the Twitter sample and a more integrated network (whereby nodes share multiple links to their neighbours) derived from the legacy media coverage. In the following section, these findings are expanded upon; firstly addressing the cases independently, before a between cases comparison is undertaken. When considering parallels across cases, similarities in coverage are highlighted and justifications for why these particular aspects of the coverage may change between formats are provided. However, it is important to note that this is a purely narrative exploration of the results rather than one emerging from a statistical comparison of the two platforms. Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira's (2012) assertion that social media like Twitter will mirror legacy media in terms of content and styling is integral to this discussion.

When assessing the Occupy: Parliament Square case independently, the coverage by social and legacy media is markedly different. Firstly, while Twitter can be seen to directly mirror the story selection of the legacy media, it is often recontextualised or reformatted to suit the distribution method and users themselves, as predicted by Howard, (2011), Papacharissi (2010) and Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012). Secondly, the Twitter sample emphasised the role of key personalities and users within the network, in particular individuals such as @RustyRockets (Russell Brand). This was predicted by the work of Park et al. (2015) and was illustrated by both the word frequencies and co-occurrence networks. Considering the emphasis placed on key individuals, Twitter coverage had a more positive approach to the demonstration as a whole, as these individuals were protesters themselves and attempted to provide information neglected by the legacy media in their coverage of the event. This can be seen by the replacement of the term "protest" with "demonstration" in the Twitter coverage, as well as the emphasis on the message of the demonstration, over criminal occurrences during the event. Furthermore, the hierarchical cluster analysis illustrates the more positive approach online to a greater extent, as it highlights key figures such as David Graeber, who

represent strong voices within the demonstrations and discussion online. Legacy media coverage focused much more heavily on the criminal aspect of Occupy, choosing to emphasise the discussion of the “2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act” and the seizure of pizza boxes and umbrellas by police. These findings are more clearly demonstrated in the co-occurrence networks (See *Figures 5.3 and 5.4*), which show that both formats present highly fractured coverage of the Occupy event. Furthermore, in the co-occurrence network of the legacy media, nodes relating to criminality are larger than those representing the intended message of the demonstration. This means that these key nodal words are dominant and have greater influence in the coverage.

The coverage of the British General Election 2015 represents an interesting counterpoint to the Occupy case, given how both Twitter and the legacy media sought to provide salient political information on the event but prioritised this information differently. For example, within the legacy media coverage, there was a significant amount of time devoted to discussing Scotland and the potential for an EU referendum. On the other hand, the coverage on Twitter emphasised users and hashtags relating to electoral participation, such as “#registertovote”. All of these topics represented significant nodes within the co-occurrence networks (See *Figures 5.1 and 5.2*) either in terms of size (indicating frequency of repetition) or centrality (indicating their importance to other surrounding nodes). Perhaps the most notable feature of the Twitter content here is the extremely fractured nature of the coverage when compared to legacy media. To illustrate this argument, many of the nodes here are not linked- meaning that there is very little cross-pollination in terms of topics or ideas; at least within the most notable discussions within the network. That being said, the hierarchical cluster analysis and word frequency help to expand upon the absences within the co-occurrence network, as they draw attention to terms that are not present within the network such as “Scotland” and the “SNP”; which *Chapter 4* showed to be important to the narrative surrounding the General Election. Returning to the legacy media coverage of the event, little time is devoted to discussing policy; instead the majority of articles emphasise the political manoeuvring undertaken by the candidates. The reliance on personality here differs to its use on Twitter. The key personalities on Twitter represent central hubs distributing information to a variety of users (Park et al., 2015), whereas in the legacy media they are the focus of stories relating to incompetence and rivalry (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenbauer & Vohs; 2001).

### *Cross Case Comparison*

The following sub-section employs a between-cases perspective to explore the results in terms of how the two content creators differ stylistically in their coverage of the sampled events. By shifting perspective, it can be seen that the coverage obtained from Twitter relied less on conflict-orientated messages than its legacy media counterpart. This is highlighted in both cases, though is most apparent in the Occupy case, as illustrated by the word frequencies (see *Table 5.3* and *5.4*), where terms such as “Democracy” simply do not appear within the top 20 citations of the legacy media. On the other hand, terms such as “Police” and “Protest” occupy a much higher position in coverage of the legacy media when compared to the Twitter rankings. However, the important caveat is that the emphasis on conflict is not restricted to the legacy media, it is also present on Twitter. One such topic that is reiterated across both platforms is the arrest of the Green Party’s Jenny Jones, though the context is different, with Twitter challenging her “wrongful” arrest as shown by the grey node in *Figure 5.3*. This focus on criminality is suggested in the earlier breakdown of the results, where the emphasis placed on these topics can be seen.

The emphasis placed on legacy media’s tendency to rely on personalities during the discussion of policies is important for two reasons. Firstly, considering Twitter’s propensity to rely on key individuals to mobilise users (Park et al., 2015), reliance on personality is not inherently an issue. To illustrate the point, the ability of social media platforms like Twitter to rapidly disperse information laterally through key individuals (as alluded to in the democratic participation model of the press; McQuail, 2002), means the coverage is simultaneously personalised (due to the benefits of the interface), crowd orientated (given the frequency of retweets and the multitude of voices present) and affective. This can be argued to lead to a greater uptake of the distributed information, due to the increased trust in other reliable and accountable users (Jenkins, Li, Kauskopf & Green, 2009; Turkle, 2011). This leads to the second point, that the legacy media can be seen to rely on conflict-orientated messages and a portrayal of key officials as inept, particularly in the case of Nick Clegg (Lichter, Lichter & Amundson, 2000) or xenophobic in the case of Nigel Farage and UKIP (Moy, Xenos & Hess, 2006). The coverage of political figures in the manner outlined above is predicted by Levy and Rickard (1982), who discuss the impact of such portrayals of elected officials within the context of the legacy media. The emphasis on personality in this instance- instead of facilitating a debate surrounding policy- could be argued be to sensationalise or transform salient political information into entertainment (Marcuse, 1964); devaluing the political realm overall and leading to limited

political engagement and an undermining of individual agency. This transformation occurs in both formats, but is most apparent in the coverage of constitutional events.

Considering what has been said about the role of individuals online and the multiplicity of ideas present (along with affective description), it could be argued that social media platforms like Twitter could be capable of disseminating the political knowledge deemed important to the quality of citizenship within the country, at least in a manner comparable to the legacy media (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochschild, 2010). However, in terms of facilitating non-constitutional engagement online, the benefit of Twitter's diversity is that it goes some way to bypassing the potential problems associated with the legacy media's role as a perceived expert in terms of cultural dissemination, as illustrated in Latané's (1996) work. This calls into question the role of the gatekeeper (which at present is the legacy media) in fostering particular avenues of coverage, inquiry and engagement:

Processes of 'gatekeeping' in mass communication may be viewed within a framework of a total social system, made up of subsystems whose primary concerns include the control of information in the interest of gaining other social ends (Donahue, Tichenor & Olien, 1972, p. 42).

By advocating the necessity of traditional political behaviours (such as voting and party membership; Boulianne, 2009; Pasek, More & Romer, 2009) and demonising those that engage with non-constitutional politics (Donson, Chesters, Welsh & Tickle, 2004), there is the potential to create an attributional bias towards the behaviour (in this case voting), divorced from a sincere engagement with the topic (Bandura, 1986). Pontes, Henn and Griffiths (2017) suggests that this may be at the heart of the issue when it comes to young people's political engagement. They suggest that the emphasis on apathy - given the lack of youth engagement with constitutional politics - does little but obfuscate the desire of young people to engage. Instead of demonising non-constituional engagement, a greater attempt should be made by the legacy media to identify meaningful opportunities for young people to influence the political discourse.

Within the coverage of the selected legacy media, justifications for the policing of the protest are arbitrarily given (see *Section 4.5*). Furthermore, they are provided in such a manner as to construct a benevolent reason for their role in the proceedings (upholding the "*2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act*"). This topic illustrated Howard's (2011) point on the reflexivity of the legacy media. When compared to Twitter coverage, the legacy media was in some ways forced to

redact or supplement coverage in order to address issues regarding the police's involvement in the removal of pizza boxes and umbrellas as sleeping equipment and structures (again discussed at greater length in *Section 4.5*). The reactions of the press in this case were predicted in Herman and Chomsky's (1988, p.1) propaganda model, in which media organisations must "actively compete, periodically attack and expose corporate and governmental malfeasance, and aggressively portray themselves as spokesmen for free speech and the general community interest" if they are to maintain their position as gatekeepers as detailed by Donahue et al. (1972).

The most notable limitation that can be levelled at the content analysis contained within this chapter is the unequal sizes of the sampled Twitter data. The discrepancy means that the analysis is by no means comprehensive, though it adds context to findings of *Chapters 6* and *7*. Considering the emphasis placed on a narrative comparison the discrepancy in sample size is mitigated by the computer mediated approach. Furthermore, because of the lack of direct statistical comparison (due to the unequal sample sizes) the assessments made regarding the similarities and differences between the two platforms (while informed by the data itself) require the support of the wider literature. That being said, despite these sampling issues these results do provide some insight into the nature of media coverage of contemporary political events. This discussion of sampling extends to the second limitation, in that Twitter is not region-locked. As such, not all tweets can be assumed to originate from British users or news aggregators. This is worthy of consideration when evaluating the findings because some of the evaluations of the explored events may be coloured by national sentiment or a misunderstanding of the British context. A third possible limitation that could be levelled at this approach is that the findings focus on a restricted number of events and as such, are only truly representative of those events. Any attempts to generalise beyond this context should be done carefully and with an awareness of relevant abstraction. That being said, a number of the findings here replicate those of other recent literature focusing on the Arab Spring, most notable the reflexivity of the Twitter platform when compared to the legacy media and the role of key users in facilitating the debate outside of a mono-directional discourse (Markham, 2014; Papcharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Park et al. 2015).

To summarise, the findings of the computer-mediated analysis suggest that there is an attempt on Twitter to provide valuable information relating to policy and engagement in a personalised and emotive manner. This is predominantly achieved through the discussions facilitated

by key individuals within the network, as suggested by Park et al. (2015). The importance of these individuals is most apparent in the coverage of non-constitutional events, as demonstrated in the Occupy: Parliament Square case. The extent to which this allows the “readership” of these users and hashtags to find their own place in the story is explored in *Chapter 6* where it is developed in relation to the lived experience of British young people. By distributing information around these hub individuals, Twitter goes some way to reclaiming the ability to distribute knowledge in manner that transcends the mono-directional discourse exemplified by the legacy media (Friere, 1971; Herman & Chomsky, 1988). By being able to interact with those occupying a hub position, users of the platform can develop trust in their reporting of an event, something that is important when predicting agency in both Azjen (1991) and Bandura’s (2001) behavioural models. Furthermore, the greater diversity in coverage across cases suggests that there may be a less stringent bias towards traditional conceptions of politics on Twitter (an assessment supported by McIntyre, 2012). This more diverse approach to coverage allows for non-constitutional forms of engagement such as the Occupy demonstration to gain ground with the users of the network, providing some explanation for the rise of these individualised political act illustrated by Copeland, (2013) and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013).



## **Chapter 6: Exploring youth attitudes and feelings toward politics and their involvement with both social and legacy media**

*Chapter 6* constitutes a qualitative exploration of the subjective and experiential understanding of young people's involvement with the British political system and media, both online and offline. The chapter analyses the testimonies of four research participants in order to address the second research question, which seeks to make sense of how the use of social and legacy media could be linked to political engagement in the lived experience of media users. The analysis places particular focus on how individual conceptions of agency are impacted by involvement with the British legacy media and social media sites, such as Twitter. The testimonies facilitate an in-depth exploration of the topics of interest and techniques used by those sampled as part of their day-to-day interaction with British politics. The latter half of this chapter utilises these insights in conjunction with those derived from the previous chapter to provide an alternative perspective; one which focuses on individual sense-making practices. Finally, this chapter highlights the components of agency deemed salient to the individual and how this can be applied to the final methodological tier.

### **6.1: Contextualising the approach and importance of IPA**

As identified in *Chapter 2*, the political system in the United Kingdom has witnessed a decline in traditional forms of political engagement (voting, party membership etc., Strømsnes, 2009); a trend that is not restricted to the British population, replicated both in the United States and Europe at large (Esser & de Vreese, 2007; López Pintor & Gratschew, 2002). Furthermore, it has resulted in the British electorate being referred to as apathetic and disenfranchised (Armston, 2005). The decline that began in the 1950's is mirrored in the constituent nations of the UK, but is not indicative of a lack of interest in politics, considering the level of voter engagement demonstrated during the Scottish Referendum. During the Scottish Referendum, 85% of the Scottish population voted, compared to the 66% of the British national population who turned out for the 2015 General Election (Scottish Independence Referendum, 2014; UK Political Info., n.d.). While these turnouts certainly suggest that political engagement is not as poor as Armston (2005) has stated, this disparity may result from the format of the voting process and the role of the media in the campaigns. It has been noted that referendums have become increasingly popular in recent years (Hobolt, 2009; Scarrow, 2001). The popularity of referendums is based on the notion that they can be seen as a method of facilitating a greater sense of political efficacy, due to the perception of greater representation (Dyck & Lascher, 2009) and direct engagement with the political process by citizens (Mendelsohn & Parkin, 2001). It could be argued

that this perception of greater representation (given the binary nature of referendums) may counteract the increase in political apathy, due to the ability of the electorate to perceive meaningful change, brought about by their direct involvement (Armstron, 2005; Budge, 1996) which in turn promotes a greater sense of agency (Azjen, 1991; Bandura, 2001).

Both legacy and social media have been the subject of many discussions regarding their level of influence in fostering political engagement (Copeland, 2014; Levy & Rickard, 1982; van Dijk, 2012). However, these studies do not provide a consensus. In many cases, they advocate completely different arguments, based on a number of assumed factors influencing political engagement. These factors include acquisition of political knowledge, political freedom and socioeconomic status, which are typically shown to increase engagement (Almond & Verba, 1963; CIVICUS: Enabling Environment Index Project Team, 2013; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochchild, 2010; Verba & Nie, 1972). However, they do not seem to have an impact among British youth, especially when considering the common perception that young people are politically apathetic (Armstron; 2005; Esser & de Vreese, 2007). Levy and Rickard's (1982) study highlights that the way in which politicians are presented within news coverage is likely to foster feelings of helplessness and ineffectuality within the political realm. This conclusion is supported by a number of Marxist theorists such as Althusser (2014) and Marcuse (1964), who suggest that the systemic problem of political engagement is maintained; either by the sublimation of the political realm into a serialised drama, or by the replication of dominant ideology through a variety of social institutions (e.g. schools or church groups).

A large portion of the relevant literature and theories pertaining to this particular topic were developed in the pre-digital age when methods of communication and media production structures were different. As such, reference to the work of individuals like Marcuse (1964) and Levy and Rickard (1982) during a discussion of social media must be done in the knowledge that they did not address the platform directly, meaning more contemporary work is also needed to support any assessments extrapolated from their work. Similarly, the earlier work of Freire (1970) provides an alternative perspective to fostering engagement that may shed light on how to encourage an empowered youth in Britain. He argues that bi-directional discourse is integral to facilitating the acquisition of salient political knowledge and understanding. Woo-Young (2005) provides contemporary support for this assessment by suggesting that social media can foster political empowerment in this manner by discussing policy online with similarly motivated individuals.

The emphasis on narrative and interpretations of individual subjective experience provided by IPA represents a novel method by which youth engagement with the political sphere can be explored. Rather than focusing on particular metrics related to constitutional (voting) and non-constitutional (protests and rallies) aspects of political engagement, as Armstron (2005), Hobolt (2009) and Scarrow (2001) have done, IPA interviews focus on the series of events and experiences that have shaped each individual's understanding of the political sphere and their role within it. These individual testimonies emphasise the importance of "what the experience for **this** person is like, what sense **this** particular person is making of what it is happening to them" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; p. 3) in the context of temporally salient experiences that come together to generate their own political efficacy. Dilthey (1976) highlights the importance of individual units of experience but also emphasises the need to contextualise them within wider meaning. In relation to the thesis as a whole, these units of experience relate to news coverage of events, participants' involvement online, as well as political engagement. While these single units may not have a great deal of bearing on individual desires to engage in politics, when taken in concert these subjective experiences stand to yield valuable insights regarding the various mechanisms that facilitate or inhibit political engagement.

The cause of the decline in political engagement highlighted by Armstron (2005) represents an important facet in the discussions of engagement covered in this thesis. As such, by focusing on the experiential and phenomenological constructs that impact British youth in this regard, the methods employed address the individual engagement of participants with social media, the legacy media and ultimately their direct involvement with politics. Justification for emphasising these particular constructs during the interviews is derived from the work of Shah, Kwak & Holbert (2001), who illustrate that specified internet use can be used to generate a model predicting social capital in those under 35. In addition, the adoption of social media as a tool can be seen to influence positive behaviours associated with political engagement in a number of areas (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). This provides a counterpoint to the notion that young people are not known to be regular consumers of agenda-setting media in its traditional format (newspapers), as demonstrated by the Hansard Society audit (2012). The primary focus of *Chapter 6* is on the individual experiences of engagement with these platforms. In doing so, the analysis below seeks to define how individual experiences of consuming social and legacy media may influence perceptions of political efficacy, in addition to simply providing examples of how legacy media, social media and the political process are connected in the sense-making of young British users. This chapter adopted a person-centred approach to exploring media impact on political engagement and individual agency rather than one concerning broad

audience effects. This places greater emphasis on individual agency which is particularly important considering the role of the researcher in subsequent analysis and the IPA method overall (Bourke, 2014; Cohen, Manion and Morris, 2011; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; for more detail on the adopted position please refer back to *Section 1.1*).

## **6.2: Introducing the participants: Sample selection and process of analysis**

### *Participants*

In order to safeguard confidentiality, all names in this chapter have been changed. The interview sample was drawn from British nationals aged 18-25; this was to ensure the relevance and saliency of all questions to the target demographic, characterised as apathetic and disenfranchised with the British governmental system (Henn, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005). Four individuals were invited to be interviewed and were selected using opportunity sampling; each is described briefly below:

Louise: Louise was aged 22 years old, cohabiting with her boyfriend in the Midlands in a traditionally Conservative constituency. Louise had recently graduated from University and was in possession of a 2:1 honours degree in Criminology. Since graduating she has been employed full-time in a managerial role.

Teresa: At the time of interview, Teresa was aged 25 years old, cohabiting with her boyfriend in the South East of England in a primarily Conservative constituency. Teresa graduated from University three years ago with a 2:1 honours degree in Psychology and since that point has been involved in a variety of unskilled jobs. At the time of the study she was working self-employed within the arts.

Peter: Aged 24 years old, Peter cohabits with his girlfriend in the Midlands in the same constituency as Louise. Peter left school aged 18 in possession of a series of A-levels, and has been employed as a leisure manager at a local sports centre since then in order to fund continued study in aviation.

Chris: At the time of interview, Chris was aged 25 and living with his parents in the South East of England within the same Conservative constituency as Teresa. Chris left school aged 16 and has worked in a variety of unskilled jobs, but at the time of the study was employed as manager in a small retail chain.

The small sample employed here is typical of the IPA method, where depth of analysis is more important than ability to generalise the results. On this point, it is understood that the sampled

participants are not truly representative of the target population, and as such there are limits on what can be gleaned from the individual testimonies in relation to the research questions outlined in *Chapter 1*.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) advocate a sample size of between three and six when conducting IPA interviews, in order to ensure a sufficient level of detail is reached during analysis. Longitudinal studies conducted using the method may opt for larger numbers in order to account for the loss of participants over time, though even in these situations Smith, Flowers and Larkin suggest that samples above ten are unfeasible. Additionally, the current work does not seek to evaluate changes in how young people feel about media and politics. Therefore, the larger sample size associated with longitudinal works is inappropriate for work at hand, considering that this method represents only a part of a more complex methodology that does not employ a longitudinal approach.

#### *Data collection*

Recruitment was carried out in person and the details of the study were made apparent at the time of recruitment. Participants were invited to schedule a time in which the interviews could take place, either at their own home or at a suitably relaxed and private location. Interviews were recorded using an Olympus DM-450 voice recorder. Each participant was provided with an information sheet and consent form, fully describing the ethical considerations of the study and the rights relating to withdrawal. Furthermore, verbal consent was obtained prior to conducting the interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed (See *Appendix 3*) and carried out on a one-to-one basis over a period of three weeks, resulting in 4 ½ total hours of interview recordings. The interview schedule itself was designed to encompass the topics relevant to the thesis. However, the primary aim of the interviews was to allow the participants to speak freely and in detail with regards to their own experiences online, of traditional news coverage and of their personal involvement with national and local politics. This allowed participants to reference particular events in the context of their own lives. The semi-structured nature of the interview schedule was constructed to aid this process, allowing individuals to highlight points of significance and provide deeper meaning than if structured questions were used. By conducting the interviews in this manner, it was ensured that the richness and complexity of each participant's emotional experiences of involvement within the areas outlined above was captured. Thus, the interview was primarily directed by the participants' own testimony rather than the interview schedule, allowing for the emergence of

unique themes and content. The interview data was transcribed (See *Appendices 5.1 to 5.4*) in full in accordance with the style indicated by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), (2009), which emphasises the need for a verbatim account but does not require the recording of information such as the exact length of pauses or non-verbal utterances.

### *Analysis*

The approach taken by IPA is iterative rather than prescriptive; it advocates a set of flexible guidelines that can be adapted by individual researchers in light of their respective research aims (Smith, 2004; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). *Chapter 6* sought to utilise the data in two ways. The first application assessed experiential claims, concerns and understandings of each participant in relation to the topics covered within the interview schedule. The second application saw the data set combined into a single larger sample, in order to allow for a broader analysis that aimed to audit interpretations and develop a greater level of coherence. Completing the analysis in this manner generated a more nuanced understanding of each individual testimony and helped to identify underlying relationships and concepts across the participants. The analysis was conducted over a series of iterative stages, each developing logically from the last; adding increasing levels of depth to the analysis - in accordance with the broad guidelines established by Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009), and beginning with the act of transcription itself. The transcription was completed by hand in NVivo and was supplemented by several readings of each individual case, before analysis began in earnest. The purpose of transcribing the recordings in this manner and the continued reading of the individual transcripts was to allow the researcher to immerse themselves fully into the experiences contained within the testimonies. This critical reflection represented the first iterative process in the analysis and began during initial reading and subsequent re-reading of the transcripts, producing a series of annotations relating to points of significant interest.

The second stage of analysis involved returning to the transcript and utilising the annotation feature of NVivo to transform initial notes from the readings into more specific comments relating to phrasing, language, themes, psychological concepts and abstractions. This process of transformation switched between inductive and deductive positions, as each account highlighted content and topics unanticipated by the researcher or not directly addressed by the interview schedule. It is through the process of inductive/deductive analysis that the results obtained through the IPA methodology can endorse, modify or challenge existing literature. However, during the process of analysis and the integration of the testimonies with existing literature, it was vital that the connection between the

participant’s individual understanding and the interpretation of that understanding by the researcher was not clouded or lost. These analytical stages were epitomised by a highly detailed assessment of every component of a participant’s testimony. The later stages of analysis attempted to distil the testimonies further by coding them, creating connections between the preliminary themes identified and clustering them in a manner that accurately described the participant’s interpretation. These clusters were given descriptive labels representing high-order themes which conveyed the conceptual nature of the themes themselves. As part of the analysis, a table of super-ordinate themes was produced (*Table 6.1*). The table contains a list of all themes identified within the testimonies as a whole, the various subthemes that make up each of the high-order super-ordinate themes, along with a description.

*Table 6.1: Table of super ordinate themes emerging from the interview data*

<b><i>Super-ordinate Themes</i></b>	<b><i>Description</i></b>	<b><i>Subthemes</i></b>
<i>The digital native vs. the digital immigrant</i>	This theme focuses on the extent to which the participants identify with the concept of “digital native” in the manner described by Prensky (2001) and whether they demonstrate the behaviours associated with online nativity such as the assimilation of sources and engagement with other users.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consolidation and Assimilation of Information Online</li> <li>- Social Media as a Form of Protest</li> <li>- Solidarity and Identification with other Natives</li> </ul>
<i>Solidarity online, alienation offline</i>	This theme focuses on the solidarity felt online by young people alienated from the political process and those seeking political systems in which they can elicit meaningful change on their own terms (ie. political consumer practices).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Political Abandonment and Mistrust</li> <li>- Social Media as a Deviant Political System</li> <li>- Us the Unwanted and Them the Politicians</li> <li>- Barriers of Entry into the Political Sphere</li> </ul>
<i>Legacy media as a method of government</i>	This theme focuses on the participant’s interactions with the British legacy media and is characterised by a distinct lack of trust. This mistrust is associated with the transmission of misinformation by these organisations and the predilection towards negative or conflict orientated news stories.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bad News Sells</li> <li>- Media is the Voice of Governance</li> <li>- Scare Tactics and Misinformation</li> <li>- Inability to Challenge Media Practice</li> </ul>

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<i>Redefining the political dialogue?</i>	This theme is contentious in that it appears to divide the participants between a desire for change and resignation to the fact that change is unlikely. It explores aspects of politics that interest those participants and how the system could be changed to facilitate engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social Media as a Forum for Direct Democracy</li> <li>- Efficacy Resulting from the Ability to Perceive Change</li> <li>- Seeking a Political Discussion that Goes Both Ways</li> <li>- The Desire to Engage in Politics that We Can See Happening</li> </ul>
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The themes identified emerged from the highly iterative process whereby the researcher can be seen to move between the various stages outlined above over multiple readings. This is done to ensure that the integrity of the participant’s individual experience is maintained. The depth of the analysis is sufficiently detailed that, through the results obtained and the table produced, it is possible to track the analytic journey from the raw data to the produced table. The act of conducting this analysis involves continually reworking and refining the researcher’s understanding and their interpretations of the topics of interest. This is done until the analysis and relationship to the literature is sufficiently rich and evocative of the individual experience represented by the testimonies. Analysis is continued through the formal process of writing up, the interplay between the researcher’s interpretations and individual testimony should create a narrative account that is greater than the sum of the constituent parts. The following results provide a close textual *reading* of the participant’s account, moving between description and interpretation of the various components, clearly differentiating between each as the analysis continues. It is important that the analysis retained a significant amount of the original testimonies, in order for the participants to retain ownership of what is being said. However, at the same time they should be sufficiently embedded in the research framework that it is able to account for the phenomena being explored (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999).

### 6.3: Developing the themes: Unpacking the results of analysis

The following section explores the four super-ordinate themes derived from the analysis. A brief overview of each is provided below before being covered in detail; outlining the particular *reading* of the researcher in relation to the topic at large, the language utilised by the respondents, as well as the content and parallels or differences between the individual testimonies. The analysis initially focuses on individual testimonies, before bringing in complimentary or contrasting points from other respondents. The purpose of this is to generate as rich an analysis as possible, without diluting the individual testimonies of those involved. The various themes are addressed in line with their presentation in *Table 6.1*.



### 6.3a: *“The digital native vs. the digital immigrant”*

The term “digital native” is attributed to Prensky (2001) and is often applied to a person who is assumed to have a level of digital literacy as a result of being born post 1980. In the context of these testimonies, “digital nativity” is indicated by the willingness to identify with social media, appreciate the benefits of interactions online and perceive social media as a valid political forum. Characteristics that epitomise a “digital native” are the ability to evaluate, consolidate and assimilate information online from a number of sources and apply them (in this case to the political sphere). In addition, “digital natives” are able to challenge those that also inhabit the digital space, in order to foster the transmission of ideas; echoing Mill’s (1947) concept of a marketplace of ideas. In contrast to “digital native”, the term “digital immigrant” on the other hand is applied to those who do not demonstrate the same competency with computers and do not identify with the online platforms overall (often resulting from having not grown up with digital technologies). The various subthemes that make up this super-ordinate theme characterise concepts such as shared interest across users and can be used help codify online behaviours in a manner that can be linked to perceptions of politics and adherence to the platform overall.

Within the early stages of the interviews, participants were asked about their engagement online and to characterise how they understood social media and its role within their day-to-day life. The first aspect of the analysis looks at how people seek out stories and how they go about verifying those articles. Teresa, like many of the other participants, cites a regular use of social media for finding information on current events, though the actual sources vary depending on the information sought, with more traditional sources being used infrequently as supplemental material.

...most of the time I will rely on... ummm... Facebook or Reddit in order to receive my views...  
Reddit I tend to use as more [for] world... ummm... world events ummm.... because the people  
that are posting there are posting from all around the world, whereas Facebook is more my closer  
circle of... is my circle of friends and acquaintances and people I personally know therefore...  
Facebook, if there is something going on for example in my home town ummm... [Break to further  
elaboration] I do very occasionally watch the news but that is a rarity nowadays I ummm... I tend  
to use the internet for finding about current events. [Teresa]

Teresa demonstrates a keen awareness of the potential multiplicity of coverage as well as the subjective nature of each source and tailors her own consumption accordingly. She highlights the communal aspect of Facebook, relating to a group of friends in a geographic location; her “home town”. The frequent use of “ummm...” indicates a reflective engagement with the topic and the

nature of her own use of sources online. This idea of identification with “close friends” is restricted when she speaks about her use of Reddit as a source. However, the way in which she references that “... people are posting from all around the world” and the general use of the term “people” indicates a lack of closeness to those posting on Reddit when compared to her “close friends” on Facebook. This demonstrates an element of scepticism, but the way in which she references this site indicates a clear preference for the wider and more diverse coverage of events compared to that of Facebook. Her process is contextualised primarily within the use of social networks and access to online sources; her final statement referring to accessing information from the “news” appears as an afterthought; suggesting that it places lower in her value system with regards to content. Her adoption of these digital formats as her primary source of information, as well as her reluctance to utilise more traditional dissemination formats such as newspapers, indicates a familiarity with social media, marking her clearly as a “digital native” as described by Prensky (2001).

Louise elaborates on the value of social media and access to information, but warns of a need to evaluate and fact check. She states:

I think... it is reliant on someone wanting to read into it, so me personally if I see something online and I am not sure how true it is or not I am quite happy to look up and look at news articles and do a little bit of reading around it to try and work out exactly what I think about something before I would vote on it. Whereas I feel others might not, and equally they would, that would limit them ever so slightly, that may be the thing. [Louise]

Her particular testament implies that this act of fact checking is not something that she thinks everyone engages in, stating that the validity of online sources is dependent on how a person contextualises that information. Her use of “me personally” when discussing her “fact checking” suggests that not only are individuals disinclined towards fact checking, but there is a potential need for this behaviour online. The need for checking does not appear to be applied in a negative way in this particular testimony and is comparable to Teresa’s evaluation of different sources for different purposes. The fact that Louise is able to engage in this behaviour demonstrates a desire to engage with current events, but the closing lines of her statement suggest a concern that others do not and that this “limit(s)” them to a certain extent. In fact, Peter demonstrates an awareness that not all sources online are valuable and credible but unlike Louise, he does not identify any sort of fact checking behaviour, suggesting a reduced engagement with the platform:

It is like if you... for instance if you have a friend who posted say ummm... about a politician that has done this, I dunno... for instance say there was a sex scandal or something like that, just them

saying it... just one of your friends saying this person has done it doesn't necessarily mean it is truthful... [Peter]

When addressing his use of social media, much of Peter's testimony is cynical, as he does not place a great deal of trust in the statements of his friends online. This is similar to what Teresa has said in relation to her perception that her friends are reliable sources when addressing topics tied to a shared geographical location- her "home town". Peter however, addresses this in a slightly different way without the caveat Teresa places on the value of her friends' information. Peter suggests that while his friends are his primary sources of information, it is not them who he is most inclined to trust. Instead Peter prefers to rely on those operating in an official capacity such as event organisers:

A source coming from the genuine original organisers, putting something on Facebook that being something you can probably rely on being truthful... [Peter]

However, his use of "probably" suggests that even with the coverage coming directly from the event organisers, he might not be getting the full picture. The particular use of "truthful" is interesting in this context. Rather than factual, it suggests the presence of another speaker, such as one of his friends, due to repetition of "truthful" between statements. His colloquial tone implies a more limited awareness of source background and understanding that these "original organisers" are comparable to those he interacts with within his friend group. Teresa explores this aspect of legacy media, emphasising the existence of a mono-directional discourse inherent in their coverage both on and offline.

I would say mainstream media is, is more of a one way street in terms of... um... in terms of media as it were, umm... I would see regular media as things like newspapers, TV, radio, anywhere where media presented to you, and there is less of an interaction with it, obviously you can interact with it, and there is an interaction with it, but online social media, it's a platform in a way that you can interact with the original provider of that media. [Teresa]

The way in which she emphasises the ability to interact with original providers, highlights the value she places on social media and their predilection towards bi-directional discourse. She refers to traditional media as a "one-way street", with the connotation that it is expected that a person does not explore around the topic and that information is goal-orientated as well as unwavering. It also suggests- based on her previous testimony- that she feels it is restrictive, considering her source verification practices. This is reinforced by her use of "presented to you", making it seem more of a show rather than the distribution of important information. Her attempt to back-track and provide justification relating to limited interaction with "regular media" appears cynical and appears as an attempt to justify its worth without causing offence. It is worth noting that when providing sources of

so called “regular media”, newspapers are cited first. Considering that the question was contextualised around the discussion of current events, it would suggest that she sees newspapers as the primary agenda-setting media sources, followed by TV and radio. After “acknowledging” the importance of newspapers to discussions of current events, Teresa returns to a perspective in which she derides the mono-directional discourse epitomised by “regular media”:

I think there is enough of a voice from, from everybody that is on the social media platform in question, to provide sort of the opposing viewpoint, rather than mainstream media, where if you read a newspaper, and you’re reading an article on X, Y or Z, that says, that presents a story, it will present it in that one way, it may present it reasonably neutrally, but that isn’t necessarily... obviously then representative of the viewpoints. Obviously if they present the news story in that way you are reading it passively and you have no interaction with that... with the writer or with the source, or with the story in general... it’s very one way, whereas with social media you can generate a two way dialogue, either with the, with the original company that has written it, or the person that has written it, or the people around you, the people that are potentially involved in that situation. [Teresa]

Again, newspapers are the first point of reference when Teresa refers to information relating to current events and policy. However, an interesting deconstruction of the neutrality contained therein suggests that this neutrality is less desirable than the multiplicity of perspectives found online. She suggests that there “is enough of a voice from ... everybody that is on the social media platform in question, to provide ...the opposing viewpoint”. This opposing viewpoint is clearly valued, as it is used in how she opens the topic relating to this particular aspect of her testimony. Furthermore, it ties into her source verification procedures and awareness of the value of alternative points of view; an aspect of coverage she only appears to associate with online platforms- at least to any significant degree- based on her previous statements. Teresa mentions that “there is less of an interaction with [regular media], obviously you can interact with it, and there is an interaction with it, but online social media, it’s a platform in a way that you can interact with the original provider of that media.”

Chris elaborates upon the idea of multiple voices, providing an interesting counterpoint to Teresa, in that he believes that social media reduces the availability of a discussion exploring the topic being addressed, be it policy or current events.

I like to listen to a lot of people, I like to listen... to see what people are talking about, because I think that's what the problem with social media. I think it's becoming antisocial, in the fact that everyone is all in this one place, and not actually really talking to anyone. I always think you

should listen twice as much as you talk, because you've got two ears and one mouth! But that's how I like, I like to listen, I like to get involved with people, I like to draw them into a conversation, if I ever hear what they are saying, in the street or in the store, I like to make a joking comment, and you can kind of get a conversation out of someone just by talking about what their interest is. [Chris]

Peter ratifies Chris' belief that online media is becoming anti-social "in the fact that everyone is all in this one place, and not actually really talking to anyone.", when he states that "Twitter... is just news feeds of someone just blogging...". Both accounts are fairly cynical in their evaluation of online discussions. However, with Chris there is a clear preference for face-to-face interaction, as it provides an opportunity to "make a joking comment, and... kind of get a conversation out of someone...". The way in which he phrases this implies that this ability to join a conversation freely and naturally is much harder to do online, particularly if you take into account Peter's comment in which those online are "just blogging". Despite this, Chris in some ways mirrors both Teresa and Louise's concepts of information transmission and fact seeking in that he says that:

[He] can then have a conversation back to the next person who may feel they want to chat about it [the previous topic], that way we are all spreading information, I think we can't just go from what one person says, because unless you hear it from the horse's mouth what can you really believe? [Chris]

Much like Peter, Chris is much more suspicious and cynical of online information in that he prefers to "hear it from the horse's mouth" and suggesting if that isn't possible, "what can you really believe?". Overall, both Chris and Peter seem far less trusting of social media as a source of information on current events, potentially due to their belief that there is limited way to validate sources. For Chris, his validation of a source's credibility comes from his face-to-face contact with those he engages with. However, for Peter it is from the perception of how close the poster is to the original source of information, be that by way of organisation, or by proximity. The two female participants on the other hand, are more comfortable with seeking out other methods of source validation. This may be tied to their university education, in that they are assumed to have had more experience or confidence in critically evaluating various sources - a practice that may be present in the men but is either not being utilised or done so to a much more limited degree. This is demonstrated particularly by Chris who, when presented information that he is unsure of the credibility of, is inclined to say "I didn't know that I only knew x, y, z, I want to know the rest of the alphabet I will go online and have a little research on Google for example and I will try and gather as much information as I can.". However, this appears to be a primarily superficial check and suggests a greater degree of trust in the original source, as he admits he is less knowledgeable and seeks to rectify this.

The ability to connect with others online goes beyond the ability to verify information, to a point in which it can be used to foster civic practices in certain situations, such as through forms of protest like boycotts or petitions. Teresa identifies social media practices that can be used to lobby companies to change their bad practices:

I hadn't received my package and I went to complain to them, and the only way I got a response from them, rather than their online forms, was through... was through social media. It was the only way I managed to get, to get a response and I went onto Twitter with the intention of tweeting about my bad experience, and hoping other people would reTweet that, and that would generate some, umm... some interest from, from that company. [Teresa]

She presents this use of social media in a calm and reasoned manner, demonstrating an attempt to engage them through traditional and more official channels, before using a more public forum that is likely to reach customers who may use the products or services of the company. Teresa emphasises Twitter in this case as:

Tweets are very short, easy posts, and it's quite easy to generate momentum, it's quite easy to trend on Twitter as well... the trending you can select it to be worldwide, or just from your country and things like that so it's a lot easier, umm... and a lot quicker to generate that sort of momentum in terms of [generating negative publicity for companies/businesses] [Teresa]

She justifies her actions in terms of trying to garner "interest" from these companies, though her use of "some" in that phrase suggests that she is unable to do this alone, hence the need to "generate momentum". Her belief in Twitter to generate this momentum appears fairly certain; her reference to "trending" implies that there is a community online focused on changing poor market practice along with other users who are prepared to assist in her actions. This solidarity is something that Teresa relies on and is a network that is "worldwide, or just from your country" depending on your trending settings. Interconnectedness is important to Teresa given how she states that:

...it is easier to connect to other people if you want to make a difference... than with the sort of "Ballot Box" politics as you put it, with that you can only rally with the people that are around you and you either may not find like-minded people or you may not have enough in order to be able to... to band together to make any sort of change whereas online it is easier to create a larger community of people and a larger... a larger crowd in order to be able to make more of a difference. [Teresa]

The ability to connect is something that differentiates those interviewed; Teresa has already suggested that online methods are an efficient way to gather support online and “create a larger community of people and a larger... a larger crowd in order to be able to make more of a difference.”. However, Chris is far more sceptical, using phrases such as “Umm... I think it’s difficult I mean, how else would you gather people together?”. Chris demonstrates a lower self-confidence or self-efficacy in terms of generating the momentum that Teresa appears to do so easily in her statements, linking back to the suggestion by Courtois, Merchant, De Marez and Verleye (2009) relating to both the demographic differences and potential to generate momentum online. Chris is also far more concerned about the perception of these sorts of movements, stating that getting a “group of people [to come] together to voice their opinion is you know, going against it isn’t it, so that’s, um... that’s the kind of a definition of a protest isn’t it”. This use of protest is far more militarised than the terms Teresa uses such “band[ing] together” and “generating momentum” to “make more of a difference”. As before, Chris is wary of movements online and calls for us “all come off of online, lets come off TV, let’s all get round in a big group and discuss what the problem is, and let’s find a solution.”. Much of his concern for this sort of engagement appears to be derived from the anonymity of the digital sphere. Louise is also wary of this anonymity online and suggests that:

I think that online without knowing [who someone actually is] it becomes very cyber it is like having a version of an avatar, if you know what I mean. You have a persona that you are on there. But why can't you just tell people who you are, what you are and what you think I don't see why it needs to be so secretive. I find that a bit uncomfortable. [Louise]

The ability of knowing who you are dealing with online is clearly something that concerns a number of the participants, but there still remains an aspect of solidarity, despite the anonymity with those of their age group (18-25) and other online users; a group that is necessary to “generate momentum” for topics that are important to the participants. Louise begins by stating:

I think Facebook can be a really good to put ideas forward because you know despite me having my privacy settings I can search other people so if there is a band that I like or if there's people from university that I may not have ever met but knew from other people I could search them and speak to them, people who I haven't spoken to in ages so I think that sort of broadens it out a lot and I know that people might use it for promotions of something or events or things like that. [Louise]

Louise is clearly concerned about privacy online and worries about the need for anonymity, both for herself and the people she interacts with, as mentioned previously. She clearly supports the tailored privacy settings, as it allows her to engage with people she “may not have ever met but knew from

other people” and seek out information relating to them. Despite her wariness of her own security, she values the opportunity to engage with others on the platform, stating:

Well I can kinda see it as everyone can kinda interact with it, it is sort of public domain so that that means that all people have access to it that’s what I think makes it social and the fact that you interact with people and build relationships and discuss personal things makes it quite social.  
[Louise]

The public nature of interactions on social media seems to foster solidarity amongst the participants, particularly based on the knowledge that they can be observed by other users. The concept of Facebook “stalking” (the act of searching through other people’s profiles), or the act of passive observation is addressed both as a behaviour entertained by the participants and the knowledge that others also engage in it. Chris states:

Personally I use it for, again just to see how everyone is doing, see what's going on in the world, see what’s happening outside the four walls, of day to day life, it gets you interested, you also then leave the house, you can try and talk to someone about it, did you hear about this, did you hear about that. It kind of sets you up for your day. I think some people use it as their morning coffee. [Chris]

The idea of passive observation by your peers is considered normal and is almost considered an aspect of routine. Chris refers to this digital routine as something “some people use... as their morning coffee”. Chris’ “morning coffee” metaphor here illustrates Blumer and Katz’s (1974) Uses and Gratifications Theory neatly and allows parallels to be drawn between the interviewees own particular uses such as Teresa’s attempts to garner support online or Louise’s search for more information on topics of interest. Teresa focuses more heavily on the platforms in which this kind of solidarity is strongest and says how she “find[s] that with Facebook it, it is something that you are posting to your friends”. Chris and Teresa both highlight this aspect of solidarity online and suggest people are able to support each other and “make more of a difference” as Teresa states. Peter emphasises his use of social media as one concerned with the solidarity shared with the friends he has on Facebook.

... you can talk a lot about, different things, and post different things on Facebook, um, but Twitter I know you can just follow people and see what they are doing, and even though you can see what each other is doing, you can't be interact very much with each other, you can put a couple of comments, but it’s very limited in what you can say, whereas Facebook gives you a much more, wide range of things that you can talk about and get engaged with. [Peter]

The way in which he refers to talk as casual conversation rather than discussions, as demonstrated by both Louise and Teresa, addresses his perception of limited interaction. He ties this to the somewhat



anti-social nature of social media addressed by Chris in his testament, but suggests that the multi-faceted nature of Facebook leads to a greater sharing of social reality, as it encompasses a number of formats, ranging from videos to posts to news articles (Burgess, Foth & Klaebe, 2006).

To summarise, the various participants engage with the digital in fairly diverse ways, influenced by their concerns regarding digital safety, as well as the validity of information obtained from sources online. The extent to which the participants value their time online depends almost on their willingness to enter the domain of the “digital native”, to assume that there is an aspect of solidarity online and that the majority of information available to them is of value. In addition, they also believe that the negativity of coverage is often offset by the desire to “mak[e] more of difference”. The testimonies all focus on the mono-directional aspect of coverage provided by agenda-setting media organisations. However, the extent to which they value and accept this as the status quo depends on either motivation to explore alternatives or education, in a manner that fosters a more critical lens. These differences are reflected in the models of behaviour provided by Azjen (1991) and Bandura (2001) and can be used to predict agency. The impact of these differences is most apparent when comparing the testimonies of the university educated Teresa and Louise with those of Chris and Peter. The confidence in their own criticality and willingness to seek out information translates a greater desire to be involved in “politics” whether than be constitutional or non-constitutional. Furthermore, these differences in behaviour whilst online define the participants as either “digital natives” or “digital immigrants”.

### *6.3b: “Solidarity online, alienation offline”*

While only two participants appeared to engage with debate online and identify with the notion of a “digital native”, all four participants expressed a shared solidarity with others of their age group and those who believe that the current political system appears to have little interest in them (Armstrong, 2005). This identification with similar people is also accompanied by a distinct feeling of political abandonment and mistrust. There is a clear disconnect demonstrated in the testimonies that suggests an inability to relate to those in power. Furthermore, the testimonies also illustrate a desire to view social media as platform for more divergent acts of politics, such as political consumerism. In this case, there is a perceived reduction in barriers to entry, considering the presence of politicians and other notable actors online, as well as the ability for some of the participants to elicit a response from large companies and organisations. However, there is also an additional belief that those within

the age group lack the required knowledge to engage fully with the constitutional methods often associated with politics.

The themes outlined above are prevalent throughout the individual testimonies and are brought up in relation to the three areas of interest; politics in general, the coverage of agenda-setting media organisations and the engagement of the participants online. Louise begins the exploration, defining her conception of politics:

I think politics and democracy appears to be in a big building and they occasionally send out these little petition forms for you to sign, which then get sent up there and they have a discussion about whether they want to listen to it or not. It is kind of what it feels like. [Louise]

The motif used in her testament; that of a “big building” brings to mind an insurmountable perception of politics as a “thing”. By presenting the abstract (or confusing) idea of “politics” as a concrete object - the “big building” - Louise engages in the process of “objectification” and “anchoring” as defined by Billig (1988). This idea is extended when she refers to the action of sending out “little petition forms for you to sign”; the use of diminutives in this context supports the notion that “big building” politics is insurmountable and provides an embedded example of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) conceptual metaphor. Furthermore, it is clear that Louise feels her opinion matters little to those that reside in parliament when she refers to the “little petition forms”, the tone of which suggests that this is merely for show and is to allow politicians to appear interested. The use of the diminutive “little” suggests that these petitions are insignificant in her own estimation, demonstrating a lower degree of political efficacy when taken in this format. Furthermore, when taken in context of “big building” politics, Louise suggests that the multitude of petitions originating from these politicians or government polling organisations are similarly insignificant to the politicians reading them. This implies that neither she nor the people around her can make any sort of difference and the act of sending out the “little petition forms” is a method of those politicians to be seen to be looking for engagement in a manner highlighted by Milbrath (1965). Teresa begins to describe why and how politicians may engage with the target population alluded to by Louise.

I mean obviously we are just one age bracket out of uh I don't know. You probably have 18-25, 25-35 sort of 6 or 7 different age brackets, so we are a sixth of the population so I think it is quite important to not alienate one bracket for the sake of getting into power I think you need to represent... try and represent everybody in the best way you can. [Teresa]

The way in which Teresa employs hesitant language such “I think you need to...” in conjunction with pauses suggests that those she is referring to- the politicians- are either not doing this or are perceived to be interested in a token fashion, pretending to represent the various age groups of their constituency. While Teresa does not demonstrate an extensive knowledge of the electorate, she is keen to emphasise that (even though she does not feel particularly well represented) she:

[doesn't] think necessarily one set of people is more important than another, ummm... because then that is just that is racism and it is discrimination and it is ageism and it is sexism if you are more swayed to one group of people than another ummm... and so I think the parties need to try and be balanced in their approaches and they need to see that everyone is important in terms of their views. [Teresa]

The emphasis on the later statement relating to the importance of each constituent groups views reiterates the point made by Louise, in which regular petitions are sent out to gauge interest on policy. However, Teresa more antagonistically states:

I think the government puts a lot more of a focus at the well the current government on the sort of upper end of society as it were because they are the people that are generating the money and they tend to be a lot more vocal... [Teresa]

Her deconstruction of how political attention is distributed amongst the national population is characterised by a dualistic understanding that creates an almost “us versus them” motif, mirroring Tajfel and Turner's (1986) presentation of social identity. With this in mind, there is a level of resentment directed by Teresa towards “upper end of society”, highlighting how their money may allow them to more easily be heard, and that it is money that is the interest of the political parties. However, this resentment and bitterness appears to be tempered by the realisation that her age group is not particularly vocal and that if she wants her age group to be better represented, they are going to have to address this and avoid a repeat of what happened:

... with the Lib. Dems. [Liberal Democrats] in the last election [2010] [in which] a lot of young people a lot of people my age voted for the Lib. Dems. ummm... because they promised to lower university fees and make education, well to make life easier for young people because they acknowledged it can be quite hard as a younger person in terms of employability and education but they sort of... with the hung parliament they went completely back on their word to get a foot hold in... in the government and therefore we were very misrepresented. [Teresa]

This particular account graduates from the tempered resentment to one in which she directly blames the government in their misrepresentation. The inference is that the Liberal Democrats sold out the people she believes got them close to power by going “...completely back on their word to get a foot

hold in... the government". The pauses however suggest that this is a reflective response and therefore more considered, especially given the gravity of her statement; it also suggests that these concerns are fairly deep-seated. Interestingly, Louise's inability to relate to politicians, due to their position in parliament is rounded-out by Peter's inability to relate based on age. He succinctly states:

I must admit there doesn't seem to be very many young politicians. [Peter]

When taken in context of Teresa's statement that it "is racism and it is discrimination and it is ageism and it is sexism if you are more swayed to one group of people than another", a lack of relatable individuals in parliament clearly contributes to perceptions of representation and willingness to engage. Peter attempts to justify this bias in that "older [gentleman] or older [ladies] [have] more experience of [life]... in their community, in their region that they can help them more than someone who is say younger." This particular comment not only reveals a respect for those in positions of power, but suggests an underlying issue relating to individual efficacy and awareness of his own downfalls or willingness to represent his age group. Louise, on the other hand becomes far more aggressive in her stance towards those that claim to represent her.

How many people in the government are even ten years close to me, they are all 30-40-50 years my senior they know nothing about me and what I need, the university fees was a very prime example, how many of those people who were discussing whether those fees should have gone up have been in university in the last 10 years? Pretty much nobody, none of them. They may have kids going but they are all privileged backgrounds and they can pay whatever they like, I don't think they spend enough time or care enough to be particularly interested in how it affects individuals in a normal middle class... [Louise]

Her use of "Pretty much nobody, none of them" here is key in that within the wider context of the above quote; she suggests that politicians are unqualified to represent her because she perceives them to be too different from her as a result of their background and outlook. The use of "them" creates the conflict needed to justify the preceding statement, in which it shows the lack of engagement from politicians with those they claim to represent, taking the same example of student fees that Teresa has. Subsequently, the use of such opposed language goes some way to rigidly defining the social parameters regarding interactions between the two groups (once again illustrating the mechanics behind social identity theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Primarily, this is due to their perceived distance based on age and social stance, as it shows a lack of identification with the 18-25 age bracket by the politicians identified in Louise's quote. The regular citation of student fees in both Louise and Teresa's accounts suggests that this is a defining point in their understanding of politics,

sculpting their perceptions of both politicians and the system. Given the age of those interviewed, it could be argued that changes to these fees could represent one of the most influential political discourses of the last 5 years. Considering that they experienced the impact of these changes first hand, it is unsurprising that the sentiment is not echoed either Chris or Peter, and why the more aggressive stance is only demonstrated by Louise and Teresa. In the quote above, Louise goes on to further characterise her belief that politicians are ill-qualified to represent her by highlighting the difference in age:

How many people in the government are even ten years close to me, they are all 30-40-50 years my senior they know nothing about me and what I need. [Louise]

and in terms of class and wealth;

...they are all privileged backgrounds and they can pay whatever they like, I don't think they spend enough time or care enough to be particularly interested in how it affects individuals in a normal middle class... [Louise]

It is clear that the responses provided by Louise and Teresa go some way to characterising their behaviour online, given that they describe themselves as having the ability to “make more of a difference” as Teresa has previously put it. Teresa recounts a time in which she sought to challenge poor business practice online when she “wasn’t getting any response from... a delivery company...”. She discusses how she used social media with the hope that “other people would reTweet that, and that would generate...some interest from... the company”. This aspect of online engagement- tied to political consumerism- demonstrates where both the women feel they have influence in terms of “making a difference”.

It has been suggested within the testimonies that there is an aspect of anonymity online that allows people to present more polarised and challenging views, views most characteristic of Louise and Teresa. Chris suggests that “people are not afraid to say what they think online and some people prefer to say things online, but then again there are people that prefer to have a face to face conversation and say actually... you are wrong I am right this is what I am saying”. Clearly, the aspect of conflict is something he feels more equipped to deal with face to face rather than online. This is an interesting statement, considering his belief that he is less likely to be judged online as “you don't have a physical person to look at so you don't have to worry about what they are thinking through facial expressions and what you are visual seeing on their face, and feeling almost judged.” The awareness of physical observation is clearly different to the awareness of observation online by

methods such as Facebook stalking, leading to a greater nervousness in the case of Chris. However, he acknowledges the safety many people feel online as a potential shortfall in the format, as meaningful change can only be brought about by a physical coming together.

There are different people in the world and people will find it easier to put it out online but face to face they will get shy about it because they feel their opinion is going to be looked down upon like a kind of underdog kinda comment but if we all came together as a collective group and saying this is us and you lets listen to each other without having an argument without any negativity, lets sort out the problems we have. Your differences are my differences and let's come to a compromise that is the only way I think we could do it. [Chris]

Again, we see a difference between Chris, Louise and Teresa's perceptions. Chris has a strong desire to compromise in order to generate a shared understanding, by emphasising collective nouns such as "we" and an emphasis on similarity and shared issues - "Your differences are my differences". This is something not echoed by either Louise or Teresa. Peter is unusual amongst the sample in that he appears unprepared to take a particular stance and is very reticent to share his stronger views; he is certainly more guarded in his responses than the others. This guarded stance may suggest that he is significantly less interested in politics than the other participants. However, this is unlikely given subsequent comments regarding policy and local politics; it may also derive from a lack of confidence or awareness relating to the political sphere. Additionally, he has demonstrated a respect for those in positions of power beyond that of the other participants, which may tie into his unwillingness to express concerns regarding the system as a whole, or challenging his position within it. In his attempt to foster a shared collaborative direction, Chris recounts his desire for how the system could change and his role within that.

I'd like to see, I'd like them to see how I do things differently, you know, you see a lot of politicians, people that are in power, they often come from a lot of money background in my opinion, or they have a different way of looking at things, and I think if you... if they spent some time doing what I do, or listen to what I the way I've done things, maybe they might have an insight to, maybe it wasn't so easy for him, or maybe it wasn't so easy for her, let's try having some... emphasis on... what it is like to struggle for example, there's a lot of people out there that are struggling, and God knows I've been there before, but we all move on don't we, but I don't think they have that option, I don't think they have that experience that would make them a much better person. [Chris]

Much of this evaluation hinges on the concept of insight and the ability to identify with others. As it has come to be expected, it is a less militarised perspective than that of Louise who clearly resents the divide between politicians and their part of the electorate. Chris seeks to increase understanding and

reduce this divide. He again focuses on shared experience “God knows I’ve been there before, but we all move on don’t we...” and that he feels that many politicians lack the empathy and insight to be truly representative “I don’t think they have that experience that would make them a much better person.”. However, despite his more measured stance, he still identifies the class and wealth divide as a significant contributor to the lack or limited representation of particular groups: “you see a lot of politicians, people that are in power, they often come from a lot of money background in my opinion, or they have a different way of looking at things...” There is a very clear “us versus them” attitude amongst the majority of the sample. Both Teresa and Louise have explored this stance and this again represents Chris’ inability to reconcile the divergent social backgrounds that are represented by himself and the age group he identifies with, as well as the background of those politicians in power. There are direct comparisons to be drawn between Chris’ understanding of this situation and in the way Louise contextualises the same inability to identify with those seen to represent them.

...they are all privileged backgrounds and they can pay whatever they like, I don't think they spend enough time or care enough to be particularly interested in how it affects individuals in a normal middle class... [Louise]

The lack of trust in the established system (whether brought about low levels of political efficacy or general cynicism) and the feeling that they are unwanted in the process at large do not appear to be the sole barriers to entering the political sphere in the traditional constitutional manner (Macey, 2001). Louise highlights a secondary concern relating to youth engagement with constitutional politics:

I think interest in politics at least to me and my friend group, kind of appears to be only really intelligent people have any particular interest and may be you are a little dry and boring if you want to post about the general election or something like that. [Louise]

The idea of politics as a taboo subject amongst the peer group is a regular citation. In some cases, it is treated as “water cooler” conversations as suggested by Chris; an interesting topic but not something people actively engage in:

I think it is very easy in people's lives to sit down and go yeah that is what I want to hear, I can accept that, I can talk about that, that is something I can talk about for my day over lunch... [Chris]

He also suggests that discussions regarding politics often devolve into an attempt to appear more intelligent “...if you give them enough key information they feel like they are intelligent enough to have a conversation about that”. The tone he takes within this quote, and his focus on external groups, suggests that he does not possess the understanding or inclination to engage with the political sphere

beyond a very superficial understanding of “key information”, as he puts it. He demonstrates a desire to be involved, but a lack of belief to actually feel he can fully engage. This is the inverse in the case of Louise, who categorically states “I am educated enough to understand it, but not interested enough to actively seek it out”. This likely extends from her earlier statement in which politics is a taboo subject amongst her close peer group. Teresa more directly addresses her disengagement with constitutional political systems when she says:

I personally am very lazy in terms of getting involved, ummm... but if... my view is if no one got involved with politics then... we would have a very apathetic society that wouldn't... we wouldn't have any politicians if nobody wanted to get involved with politics. No one would be passionate enough to want to be a politician to want to get involved. [Teresa]

The tone in this confession suggests that Teresa does not need to directly get involved as there are many more interested parties and politicians. However, the fact that she refers to herself as lazy, demonstrates an underlying understanding that there is a need for people to be engaged in politics. The testimonials of this sample highlight three key areas in which the participants feel unable to get involved in constitutional politics. In the case of Chris, he feels unequipped intellectually to engage in the governmental system; Louise is disinterested in engagement, based on the fact that it considered a taboo subject and those that engage are “are a little dry and boring” but feels intellectually equipped to engage should the need arise. Teresa finally represents a general apathy presumed of this particular age group, in that she feels she lacks the requisite passion to make a difference and that it is better to leave it to those that actively want to get involved. It could be argued that she could see this as a singular flaw within herself, but the abstract nature in which she addresses this concern could suggest that it could be a general flaw she sees within all of those aged 18-25. This secondary concern can be derived from her use of “we”, highlighting her identification with that group.

Chris is unusually direct when addressing the role agenda-setting media organisations play in distributing required political information.

I think they put enough of the key information in for you to not want to go have a look because that will make you think well why did they say just what they said... I think they put just enough information in so you sit down and accept it and then have a conversation about it, but you don't really know what you are talking about. [Chris]



According to Chris, agenda-setting media organisations facilitate a state in which you are only interested in furnishing yourself with the “key” information. He believes the reasoning for this is to enable people to engage with politics on a superficial level, in order to encourage “water cooler politics”. Chris’ reasoning behind this is to get people to “sit down and accept it and then have a conversation about it”, without ever really challenging what is being said. While he is aware of this, he has already demonstrated the unwillingness to engage in source validation practices, similar to that of Louise and Teresa.

Louise’s evaluation of traditional news coverage is that “newspapers and the news struggle to stay up to date because by the time it has been through all the processes that are involved to filter it and adapt it so that it is appropriate form the general public”. The concept of filtering is addressed to greater degree in the following theme analysis; particularly the aspect of “tainting” Louise attributes to the filtering process. Despite this, it is important to understand Louise’s relation to more “traditional” methods of accessing information on current events, and why social media may allow for a more informed electorate. She feels that because of the “raw” state of things online and the avoidance of content that has been “adapted and changed by the perceptions of other people and affected when they are filtering it and making it “appropriate”, they are changing what the final result is”. It is clear from this quote that Louise prefers to access more polarised, less neutral viewpoints online where the information accessed “is the raw material before it has been touched.” This is likely due to the source validation practices she has already identified previously:

if I see something online and I am not sure how true it is or not I am quite happy to look up and look at news articles and do a little bit of reading around it to try and work out exactly what I think about something... [Louise]

### *6.3c: “Legacy media as a method of government”*

As touched on in the previous sections, this particular super-ordinate theme addresses the participant’s engagement with agenda-setting media organisations. This super-ordinate theme particularly focuses on aspects of the coverage of news; namely the prevalent perception that there is a distinct focus on negative reporting, based on the notion that bad news sells. This idea of negative news is extended to the belief that these news organisations engage in scare-tactics and spread misinformation. Furthermore, there is a distinct belief amongst those interviewed that many agenda-setting organisations appear subservient to the government, often acting as a mouth piece for parliament. The final component inherent with this theme is the idea of mono-directional discourse,

which is most jarring to those identified as “digital natives”, as it inhibits their ability to challenge media practice and engage in their source verification procedures.

The nature of traditional media coverage is something that is raised as a concern by a number of the participants. Louise mentions that she thinks:

that the problem with a newspaper is that businesses like that, they cost money to run, there is no way that any business whatsoever could afford to just sell newspapers just because they want to tell people the right thing and educate people and things like that, it is just not a plausible business plan it is just never going to work... [Louise]

The tone she takes indicates a perception of what agenda-setting media organisations should do, how they should be responsible for providing salient and necessary information, telling people the “right thing and educat[ing] and things like that”. The lack of certainty in this phrase suggests there may be additional motives and reasons for the existence of the press. However, when taken in relation to the initial statement in which she identifies the necessity of business first, she seems almost dejected that she has been let down in some way. In an attempt to reconcile this unwillingness of the agenda-setting media to disseminate required information, Louise states how she believes that:

sometimes they make an attempt, of course they do, because they all obviously have their own agenda, they are linked to particular politic parties they all have their own political point of view, not that anyone is ever aware of which one they are playing for at [the] certain time that they are printing their papers. [Louise]

Ultimately, this evaluation degrades to a point beyond her initial unhappiness with the information being presented and she states that it is beyond pure business concerns that have motivated these organisations to engage in such behaviour. She then goes on to make a statement regarding political agendas, increasing the cynicism directed at the agenda-setting media organisations. Chris highlights that much of this content focuses heavily on negative news coverage, emphasising that the purpose of these organisations is to “grasp a lot of attention” and “because bad news will always sell better and get more attention.” He goes on to state that “I think most of the facts they put in there are facts, but it wouldn't surprise me if a lot of it was... created to make it sound better. Or worse in that matter”. Chris, after justifying the behaviour of these organisations or at least attempting to reconcile it, takes a far more cynical stance (in a similar way to Louise), suggesting that he wouldn't be surprised if exact details of stories were embellished to get more attention. The exact repercussions of this sort of coverage are returned to by Louise, who suggests that every time there is a:

report [on] every bad thing that happens in the world it seems to lessen the effect, you seem to become hardened to the fact, well they're fighting again, or and they have just been bombed and because it is on there all the time I know horrible things happen and there is and it is happening really regularly but it is almost that you become desensitised to it... [Louise]

There is a clear awareness that her own beliefs have shifted, creating a more “hardened” ambivalent version of herself. Louise begins to raise further questions relating to the role of agenda-setting media organisations in the political sphere:

I don't think it is the role of the news to tell you what is right or wrong or who to vote for or who not to vote for, or even to say that this party is better than the other just because they are in power, I don't think that is really supposed to be, or was ever the point of them being there, but I do think that is what they do now. [Louise]

Her perception clearly is that these organisations should maintain a level of balanced neutrality, providing information to allow their readership or viewership to make their own informed decision. This is made clear from how she states “I don't think it is the role of the news to tell you what is right or wrong or who to vote for or who not to vote for, or even to say that this party is better than the other...”. However, this is an assumption of what she believes the press is “supposed” to do, rather than what she believes them to actually be doing. In this case this is the inverse, whereby she mentions “I don't think that is really supposed to be or was ever the point of them being there but I do think that is what they do now”. The way she uses “was ever the point” emphasises an aspect of timeless responsibility and civil duty inherent with membership to one of these agenda-setting organisations. Chris elaborates by mentioning how newspapers aim to generate interest in the electorate and that much of it is designed as spectacle rather than substance:

They just saying that to grasp the attention of people, because realistically that's what they need isn't it, they just need people's attention. [Chris]

This leads him to question whether he can trust any coverage of politics on these platforms; “this person from this political party is saying one thing, but the other political party is going against that, but I'm sitting here thinking, do any of them really mean anything?”. The tone of his testament here is one of genuine confusion and an uncertainty of where to place value, once again reiterating some of the arguments put forward by Macey (2001) and McLaren (2012) concerning political trust and cynicism. It has already been noted how both Chris and Peter emphasise their need to hear information from the “horse's mouth”. In this case, Chris alludes to the presence of a filter resulting from the format, which causes him to question the validity of information presented in this way; that

of political sound bites taken out of context for maximum impact. His confusion is further contextualised, emphasising this particular component of information without context:

They want to grasp people's attention in a way that is almost mindboggling, it is almost like you are being turned into a robot, a drone you are being told what to do ummm... you are brought in and drawn into what you want to hear or what they think you want to hear and you I think is this what I want to believe I think it is very easy in people's lives to sit down and go yeah that is what I want to hear, I can accept that. [Chris]

Chris' regular references to automation in this quote with words like "robot" and "drone" tie through to his final statement in which he clearly resigns himself to his belief that he is one of the automatons. The resignation is particularly apparent when he states "I think it is very easy in people's lives to sit down and go yeah that is what I want to hear, I can accept that". He identifies clearly with the "people" he mentions, due to his use of "you" and the mono-directionality of information processing, brought about by exposure to this type of news coverage. He also suggests that much of this automation is due to prescribed content derived from the government itself "I just think they put the relevant information they are told to do, probably through the parties that want to get their point across". Louise extends the concept of automation to a "dumbing down" or diluting of the content distributed by agenda-setting media: "I think a lot of the time it is being politically correct, it is what they think we should know". This idea of what "they think we" should know suggests that much of the information provided is either not sufficiently detailed or focused on information that is considered valuable to the audience. Coupled with her belief that "they dumb it down a bit", Louise provides an exaggerated example in which the news organisations advocate a simplified message akin to "all you need to know is that it is really crap there so you need to vote for this person because they will make sure it doesn't get that crap here.". An interesting part of Louise's testimony is her supposed revelation regarding the BBC. She believes that it is unique knowledge that the BBC is a government subsidised broadcasting agency, which clearly colours her perception of the coverage emanating from them:

If the government own you and the government give you the money you are not going to put out something that slags off the government because you don't get the same amount of funding, which makes sense, and I think because it is a British institution, that's lovely, that's wonderful, all for having British things... [Louise]

She attempts to back-track and emphasise the positives of having a "British institution", but is wary of the potential for the government to exert control in the manner described by Chris:

The fact that [the BBC receives funding from the government] must have an influence, however [ ] little... I think that's the particular problem. [Louise]

With this in mind, it is clear that Louise advocates the existence of independent news organisations in order to bypass the prescribed information filtered down from the British government, but there are issues associated with its nature as a business, something he has already covered:

... the problem with a newspaper is that businesses like that, they cost money to run, there is no way that any business whatsoever could afford to just sell newspapers just because they want to tell people the right thing and educate people... [Louise]

Chris concisely states the opinions portrayed by each of the other participants that "... as a collective group of people [we] need to know everything that's going on, rather than what the news media think we want to hear." Exactly how this can be done is explored towards the end of this theme, by evaluating alternative methods of political knowledge acquisition, notably the use of social media.

Going beyond the role of agenda-setting media organisations and their relation to the government, the participants more directly unpack their concerns regarding how the media present information relating to current events. Louise begins by highlighting the coverage of the London Riots in 2014, particularly the coverage of the role of social media;

When it then went onto the news, although they were quite sinister comments [online] and a lot of things they were doing were not right in my point of view when it got to the news they acted like it was this big widespread thing... [Louise]

Louise emphasises how the news coverage acted as though the desire to spread the civil unrest via social media was "this big widespread thing..." The tone employed by the assertion is that the coverage does not match up with her own experiences online, despite admitting the presence of "... quite sinister comments..." existing online in relation to the riots. When taken in the context of her source validation methods as covered earlier, it would be a reasonable assumption that based on her evaluation of more traditional news sources, she believes them to cherry pick their coverage in order to foster audience engagement and sell newspapers. She goes on to state that this is particularly true of independent papers, who in her eyes – whether rightly or wrongly – favour profit and business sense over civil service. Much of this position alludes to the tabloidization of news coverage with Grabe, Lang and Zhao (2003) highlighting the impact this may have on retention and negative audience evaluations of that coverage (Grabe, Zhou & Barnett, 2001; Grabe, Zhou, Lang & Bolls, 2000). Extending this line of thought to its logical conclusion, one could suggest that Louise believes that social media provide the most reliable source for political news, though this is never said directly. With that in mind, both Louise and Peter believe that one needs to be wary of how something is portrayed,

with Peter saying that “you definitely take a lot of what is being said with a pinch of salt...” and Louise suggesting that she has a particular hatred of “... news that is.... ummm... very one sided or feels very one sided. I don't believe any story has just one side.” Louise’s belief appears to derive from her experiences at university, particularly during a module in which she was critiquing media coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict:

The news made it seem like it was much worse than it is, and I think a lot of the time where you look back at stories there was a lot of things while I was at university we looked into in more depth, like Palestine and Israel that we looked into what was the source and what it was actually like to live there and in the news in the media that is never played up, it is never played up that there’s not a particularly right on wrong side it is always, ‘this is one way this is another’ and the news and the media make it very black and white, but when you have discussions, social media enters in, it is more the raw state, I think you actually get what the true news is or what the whole you know, interaction is at least. [Louise]

This particular experience is clearly a defining factor in informing her source validation practices and her desire to seek out raw information, with the aim of generating her own evaluations based on the “black and white scale” she identifies. It is this “black and white scale” she refers to when she suggests that news coverage of complex political events are “dumbed down”. This deconstruction of news media to a simple binary position is supported by Vettehen, Zhou, Kleemans, d'Haenens and Lin (2012) and Soroka (2014) whose work highlights the potentially damaging consequences of such an approach to political coverage particularly with regards to individual agency. She emphasises the ability of social media to allow “you [to] actually get what the true news is or what the whole you know, interaction is at least”. Louise reflects on the value of her university education throughout this particular quote, namely how it allows her to take a more critical approach to the way in which news is presented that is drastically different to both Peter and Chris. This is especially true for Chris, considering his previous statement in which he states: “I think it is very easy in people's lives to sit down and go yeah that is what I want to hear, I can accept that.”; this may be due to a lack of exposure to the techniques afforded to Louise and Teresa during their time at university, as both emphasise the need for balanced coverage in their testimonies.

Peter takes a critical stance against politicians in his description of George Osborne and the budget cuts. Most of his testimony suggests that he does not often get directly involved with current events, which may contribute to his low engagement with topics concerning politics. However, in this particular situation this does not appear to be the case, though he never fully justifies why this story

is of particular interest to him. He begins to describe the situation by stating “[When] George Osborne was saying for instance... obviously they had been saying we have been cutting the budget...” but then identifies issues with the coverage, given that “... you [could] see that they had obviously reduced it, but people aren’t in jobs still and people are saying he is not doing a good job”. The emphasis on what other people were saying demonstrates that, like Chris, Peter is willing to accept other people’s opinions. However, unlike Chris he seems to be less self-aware of this stance. He does not seem interested in understanding the situation but emphasises the more superficial aspects, tying directly into Chris’ belief that people find it easy “to sit down and go yeah that is what I want to hear, I can accept that.” While simultaneously providing them with “... enough key information [so that] they feel like they are intelligent enough to have a conversation about [the topic in question]”. Louise presents a more critical understanding of the British legacy media, by raising concerns regarding their role within the political sphere:

I don't think it is the role of the news to tell you what is right or wrong or who to vote for or who not to vote for, or even to say that this party is better than the other just because they are in power, I don't think that is really supposed to be, or was ever the point of them being there, but I do think that is what they do now. [Louise]

Her perception clearly is that these organisations should maintain a level of balanced neutrality, providing information to allow for their readership or viewership to make their own informed decisions. However, the way in which she phrases this herself suggests a “hypothetical situation”; she believes this is what the press is “supposed” to do, rather than what she believes them to be actually doing. This “reading” of Louise’s quote provides an interesting insight into the consequences of the journalist behaviours presented by Skovsgaard, Albæk, Bro and de Vreese (2013) who suggest that these issues of objectivity arises in situations where objectivity is difficult to maintain and journalists are forced to interpret journalism’s “objectivity norm”. As seen across the testimonies, there is a belief that the legacy media has the capacity to help foster engagement, but in many cases can be seen to focus on negative coverage, particularly in relation to young people. This negative coverage could be argued to detract from self-esteem and self-efficacy; notable predictors of wider engagement (Bandura, 2001).

Finally, with regards to the level of trust placed in the organisations responsible for coverage of current events, there is a degree of variability amongst the participants. Teresa has strong opinions regarding how valuable traditional news coverage is:

There is a lot of corruption obviously, less so in the UK there is in other areas of the world but largely because of the accountability from the public and the politicians they need to present things that are going to be accurate. [Teresa]

However, the tone used here is questioning and unsure. She certainly does not want to be in direct opposition to the status quo, so seeks to justify the type of coverage that exemplifies the British system:

... I think largely that the accuracy of the information they provide is quite good because they will be ummm... sort of publically told that they are doing it wrong and that's either quite humiliating or they can be punished if they are providing something that is quite damning to one group of people or to one politician, unnecessarily but also it is also just morally, morally wrong. [Teresa]

Teresa's hope is that there are watchdogs are in place to ensure the accuracy of information, but as before there is an inference that it still cannot be trusted. Taking into consideration Louise's quote relating to the "black and white scale", the information may be correct but there may be aspects withheld in favour of a more definitive tone to the story. The final sub-theme contributing to the understanding of media as a tool or method of governance is the ways in which individuals seek to bypass the systems many of them feel to be defunct, corrupt or biased. Interestingly, Teresa likens the relationship between political parties and the agenda-setting media - regarding self-monitoring and a diversity of viewpoints- to engagement online with social media:

...they sort of keep each other in check. It is not just political parties; it works out as a balance. It is like, it's more of an online community I think as well in terms of everybody keeps each other... from getting to... from going in one particular direction too much and damaging... ummm x, y, or z damaging public opinion, being too persuasive, outwardly lying and things like that and most of the time they do a good job... [Teresa]

While Teresa clearly values this particular approach it is apparent that due to the size of the organisations involved and the desire to maintain profit, this self-regulation seems to be more effective online - it is important to notice at this point the parallels between what Teresa says and Habermas' (1991) "public sphere". She also suggests that legacy media news inadvertently "damage[e] public opinion", are "too persuasive" or "outwardly [lie]". However, the greatest pressure on agenda-setting media organisations to maintain good practice comes from the online community, where individuals challenge poor reporting or mismanaged information. Teresa details how "it is so easy to see the repercussions online, people will straight away comment if they think the news on [a given topic is misrepresented]... and call out news organisations if they think they are doing something wrong in some way". This accountability is something that is valued, namely due to the multiplicity of



individuals checking what they read online. There are additional concerns raised by Louise, who finds it hard to check some agenda-setting media organisations because of the lack of transparency relating to their political affiliations when she states “... they all obviously have their own agenda they are linked to particular political parties, they all have their own political point of view, not that anyone is ever aware of which one they are playing for at certain time that they are printing their papers”. Louise has already demonstrated how she wants to understand the grey areas of coverage and particularly the interactions between the component parts of coverage and the groups involved. She believes that very few people are able to separate the coverage distributed by the agenda-setting media from their political leanings, given how these organisations constantly shift their motives when it comes to challenging or supporting the government. Teresa and Louise justify their preference for the more polarised diverse viewpoints available online, with the perceived capricious nature of traditional news coverage. Teresa demonstrates this eloquently in terms of the Ukrainian conflict:

I don't necessarily think you would get a consensus on every single story, I think with things like... obviously the plane that was shot down over Ukraine, the general consensus was obviously that it was a terrible, awful, horrible thing that happened, and that's obviously representative of the opinion of the general public, but when it is something that is contentious and that does present... can encourage two completely opposing views, I think then it is a good thing to show people that it is contentious and that there are these 2, 3, 4, 10, strong, different views on this one thing. [Teresa]

This multitude of ideas online and the opportunity to explore the various perspectives held by other users epitomises Louise's engagement with social media. It also justifies how Chris and Peter, who do not appear to value this sort of source validation, react to news coverage and allow themselves to be “turned into a robot [or] drone” as suggested by Chris. It is clear that the critical evaluation skills taught at university are a considerable asset to Louise and Teresa when it comes to evaluating the credibility of the coverage provided by agenda-setting media organisations.

### *6.3d: “Redefining the political dialogue?”*

The final theme to be addressed in this part of the analysis relates to engagement with the political sphere, by exploring the views of interviewees on how the process as a whole could be changed to make it more inclusive and why some of the participants have resigned themselves to political apathy. Assessing how these individuals see social media such as Twitter in the political process and the extent to which they engage with them, highlights how the format could be seen as a forum for the political, as well as an opportunity for direct democracy. With this in mind, the

testimonies indicate ways which some of the participants engage in bi-directional dialogue with those in power, and how this shapes their own understanding of the political process and their place within it, due to the union of social and political spheres. Each of these components influence aspects of each participants general perceptions of their own agency and that agency is expressed in their day to day lives.

The individual testimonies are the most varied with regards to this theme, due in part to the level of faith each participant has in the existing system, the preference for local politics and action, ideas regarding how the system could be changed and whose responsibility it is to usher in this change. Each of the participants addresses the potential of social media to facilitate a greater degree of democracy online; Chris in particular discusses how it can encourage freedom of thought:

Socially, you can get people together; it brings people out of their shell. I think people can actually... Not worry about what they are thinking, and they can find people that they feel comfortable talking to and easily make more and newer friends. [Chris]

The primary reason for advocating the use of social media for democratic discussions or decision making for Chris, is the ability to generate an online community. He emphasises how social media are capable of “get[ting] people together [and bringing] people out of their shell.”, as well as highlighting how people are far freer with their opinions and are more willing to engage with discussions, due its anonymity and perceived lack of judgement from other users. Teresa ties the creation of digital communities to the importance of access. She suggests that access shouldn’t just be for young people and expands her points to include a broader range of individuals, affirming Chris’ assertion relating to the ability to generate well-meaning and inclusive communities online. However, access as defined by Teresa, is multi-faceted for this reason:

I feel that the kids nowadays it is easier for them to remain involved in terms of current events because there is always going to be a way that it is accessible for them and accessible for me and for my parents and accessible for the oldest generation as well... [Teresa]

The potential for greater inclusion is the biggest benefit cited by Teresa for increased digital engagement. The emphasis on this suggests that there is only limited engagement afforded currently. Teresa mentions accessibility as a possible reason for this; which when taken in context, could be used to imply both digital access and a removal of physical barriers, particularly for the elderly.

Louise advocates the value of coverage originating from individual social media users, considering that in her eyes, digital coverage (not derived from the legacy media) is significantly different from the coverage of agenda-setting media organisations “because you don't have that filter, you don't... if you say something outlandish, ok your comment might get deleted... ok... but it has been there people have seen it there is nothing anybody else can do about it”. This accountability is something that is an important feature of the platform, given that Louise firstly implies people must be more careful in what they say, tying into her concerns regarding online security. Despite these concerns about security, she suggests that exposure to more divergent opinions is what allows her to contextualise her own thoughts. Additionally, because of the ability to engage without filtering a person’s perceptions, engagement online can be “a bit like protesting almost”. The application of the way she uses protest is to a positive end, advocating free speech. The fact that she feels unable to fully voice her opinions in a more traditional sense suggests an understanding of the political sphere that is both restricted and repressive; hence why the term protest is used in a positive manner, rather than suggesting she believes the word to have a generally negative connotation.

The notion of restricted access and limited efficacy, due to perceptions of repression or poor representation, is elaborated on by Louise. Louise suggests that her vote rarely appears to count for much, as she feels she is regularly misrepresented by politicians on the policies she would like to see happen, thus limiting her political efficacy overall:

I will always participate if I feel like I vote and my party doesn't get in and nothing happens and nobody talks about what happened and nobody says what happens it almost seems like a waste of time... [Louise]

Her statement suggests that she would always vote if she could see a benefit of doing so, but as she says this, there is a clear reflection on previous experiences in which she has engaged to push through initiatives or ensure that certain things do not happen (e.g. student tuition fees increasing). However, despite her best efforts and engagement “nothing happens and nobody talks about what happened and nobody says what happens it almost seems like a waste of time...”. Her tone is resentful, which can be seen by the repetition of “nobody”, “nothing” and a “waste of time”. Teresa cites the very same instance in which her faith in the political system was rocked:

I don't... engage... very much with politics ummm... because I don't... I do vote and I have voted in the general elections I don't vote in the local elections... but... it can be quite a negative experience... obviously I did vote for the Lib Dems in the last election and they have screwed up

in terms of what they promised and what they did and obviously I am having to have a rethink about my political views and things like that so I don't necessarily engage with politics... [Teresa]

The regular citation within the testimonies of the 2010 General Election suggests that it was a defining moment in the participants' political lives. While this assertion cannot be extended beyond these testimonies given the nature of IPA, it is unsurprising that their confidence in the system has been clearly influenced, generating the unwillingness to engage (many of the participants refer to this as their first engagement with the political sphere as adults). However, both Teresa and Louise still remain motivated to get involved in civic activities, though the scope of their engagement has been reduced to local politics and a willingness to lobby against poor market practice by companies and businesses. Louise states "if I voted on something smaller you know, like a local councillor or should we build this or should we build that, I might actually see that they are building that now I have had a say in that". It would appear that from the testimonies of both Louise and Teresa that the need for a voice is of paramount importance, and at present, the place they are most easily heard is in their local constituency.

For Louise and Teresa, it would appear that the driving factor behind their willingness to engage in any sort of civic activity is their ability to see how their engagement influences the final outcome. This is exactly how Louise and Peter see their own involvement being at its height. Peter suggests that he is more inclined to "[get] involved in sort of local projects or something like that maybe... That might change different things that don't need politicians to do it...". Interestingly, unlike Louise and Teresa, his disaffection with the political system is tied less to the previous general election and more to the representation by politicians, given his emphasis on tasks "that don't need politicians". The different context of his dislike may again be due to the fact that he did not go to university; the primary point both Louise and Teresa feel most poorly represented on. The way in which Peter understands his position in the political arena is as such:

I think everyone has... even myself to sort of help with the community you are, I think probably more on a local level rather than a national level... [Peter]

It is at this point that it is worth exploring how the participants all see themselves within the context of the political system and exactly whose responsibility they believe it to be to ensure that they are represented fairly, as well as make sure that their voice is heard on a national level. Peter is very matter of fact when he says "I like to vote just to sort of say I have had my say.", though by his tone this does not suggest an overall engagement with the political sphere, merely a sense of duty and a

belief that you have no right to criticise if you are unwilling to engage overall. This belief is clarified further when he says "... if I don't vote I can't complain about something that has happened, whereas if I have had my vote and I don't agree with what they are trying to achieve I feel like I can argue...". From his statement here, his involvement appears to hinge on his ability to complain that things are not how he wants them, rather from a desire to actually influence any sort of change himself. Peter's testimony is very focused on his individual ability or lack thereof to make a difference and his ability to make the best of situation when things do not necessarily go his way. Teresa however, suggests that her engagement may be limited due to her reduced political efficacy. Nevertheless, she advocates the need for community on this particular point:

[when asked about what sort of difference to politics she could make alone] Individually not a great deal ummm... but as a community and as a crowd you can make quite a big difference.  
[Teresa]

She emphasises the need for solidarity amongst the target population:

I mean I am one sort of 25 year old that probably can't make a huge difference on my own but by rallying with the rest of... just the 25 year olds or everyone aged 18-25... [Teresa]

Her emphasis on the collective amplifies the need for a more inclusive political format. This sort of collective action she feels can have a greater impact, much like her involvement online, though there is a caveat to her belief that a collective can make a difference "...you need everybody to feel that [they can have a say] and to get involved to be able to do that [make a difference].".

When it comes to whose responsibility it is to promote this sort of inclusive collective action in politics, Teresa states:

...it is everybody's, obviously the politicians need to encourage you to be more involved because it is their policies they want you to be involved with so it is up to them to make it easy and accessible for you to get involved, but I also think it is the public's prerogative to get involved.  
[Teresa]

She suggests a more collective approach to policy by highlighting the fact that it is up to politicians to facilitate accessibility, though she does accept her peer group does have a part to play. The inclusivity of social media plays a large part in the view she has of facilitating engagement; she goes on to suggest that there is an issue with political representation currently:

... in order for them to be representing us we need to be getting involved and rallying behind them, ummm... in order to be as represented as possible ummm... so I think its... it's a mixture of both it sort of... it starts with the politicians in order to sort of get the ball rolling but they shouldn't be doing all the work in terms of getting you involved and I think online media is only helping people get involved with... because it is a lot easier to get involved, it is a lot less effort to sign an online petition than it is to go down to your local council and sign a petition there or to present you opinions on an online forum than it is to write a letter to... 10 Downing Street sort of thing. [Teresa]

The potential for social media to allow for the inclusivity desired by each of the participants is tied to a number of characteristics of the platform. First are the aspects of ease and accessibility highlighted by Teresa. The online forum has a greater potential for direct and representative democracy. There is another component that stands to facilitate the politicisation of the target population in a manner that could potentially increase political efficacy. This component is somewhat unique to social media and has been touched upon by each of the participants; the notion of bi-directional discourse. Teresa highlights the value of discussion on a digital forum from her own experiences:

I think it can work quite well... if done correctly. I think there is enough of a voice from, from everybody that is on the social media platform in question, to provide sort of the opposing viewpoint... [Teresa]

While largely positive, her uncertainty at the beginning of this statement suggests that even though social media may have the potential to facilitate greater understanding through bi-directional discourse, it is dependent on being “done correctly”. This idea of “correct” discussion/engagement is tied directly to a multiplicity of sources and an ability to interact with the opposing viewpoint; which, when it comes to politicians, seems to be less successful with many use social media to simply broadcast their message rather than discuss it (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Grant, Moon & Busby Grant, 2010). Teresa and Louise have both previously mentioned the value of debate on the platform, arguing that discussions with other users lead to a fuller understanding of the topic, as illustrated by Louise in her mentioning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Teresa also reiterates what Louise has already stated about “mainstream media”:

if you read a newspaper, and you're reading an article on X Y or Z, that says, that presents a story, it will present it in that one way, it may present it reasonably neutrally, but that isn't necessarily, obviously then representative of the viewpoints. [Louise]

It is the diversity of viewpoints that will facilitate the understanding needed to engage with politics. Louise explains the alternative:

I don't really like it if I feel that I am being preached at, particularly I wouldn't really like to have big long lists of such and such wants to do this and such and such wants to do that, because I don't think that that actually ever accomplishes anything, I want to feel like It [i.e., her vote or engagement] has progressed something. [Louise]

The way Louise describes typical party broadcasts as being “preached at” suggests how negative her perceptions of mono-directional rhetoric actually are. Furthermore, it takes on very little beyond a one-dimensional understanding; she emphasises the futility and uselessness of that form of discussion when she says: “I don't think that that actually ever accomplishes anything...”, which by extension, suggests the discussions she has witnessed or engaged with online have allowed her to “... feel like it has progressed something”. Teresa mirrors this belief and states that by interacting with the “... person that has written it, or the people around you...” she can feel “... involved in that situation.” by virtue of a “two-way dialogue” as she puts it. While not advocating the sort of discussions addressed by Louise or Teresa, Peter emphasises the need for diversity of sources in order to gain the information needed to engage:

... you should be able to get that information from different forms of media be it television, social media, newspapers or whatnot... [Peter]

However, by the way he categorises his sources of information, it is implied that he does not currently receive the information he wants in order to get involved. Louise returns in defence of social media as a whole, by suggesting that the platform may in fact bypass a lot of the bias she attributes to legacy media. She states that because the individual users tend to make clear their position (from her experience), the bias of individuals can be accounted for. Furthermore, the variety of perspectives and accounts of a particular topic adds greater depth to the content.

I think [content online] would struggle to make you biased because for everyone one person who thinks something is right there may be two people who think it is wrong and it may be that you get two comments about it being wrong and only one about it being right but you can read both, so that the thing is you may see loads of comments about it being negative but even if there is only one that gives you another point of view that has educated you on that other side, whereas if it is a newspaper it is coming in one way. [Louise]

Her conceptualisation here perfectly encapsulates the concepts outlined by Mill (1947) and summarises the potential of platform deftly. However, her statement also maintains an awareness that social media may in fact fall short of its potential in so much as it requires individuals to engage

meaningfully with the content and to not rely on a singular source. The same potential to “promote the development of more effective patterns of citizenship” (Blumler, 1970; p. 100) was touted regarding television during its early adoption; the reticence of Louise to buy into the potential of the platform demonstrates a level of far-sightedness that goes beyond the others sampled and may represent a greater understanding of the format as a whole and its potential shortfalls.

#### **6.4: Returning to the literature: Discussing the testimonies**

The analysis of these testimonies seeks to illustrate how these four people understand their political landscape and their own political efficacy, whilst drawing salient comparisons with the wider literature in order to achieve a more nuanced understanding of phenomena covered. The four testimonies covered in the analysis provide a unique perspective on the literature concerning political engagement and media usage, as highlighted by Copeland (2014) and Turkle (2011). By taking a phenomenological point of view, they challenge the common assertion that young people are uniformly apathetic (Armstrong, 2005; Esser & de Vreese, 2007); instead emphasising how there are those within that group who are pursuing politics in new and diverse ways (McIntyre, 2012). This is illustrated most clearly by Teresa and to a lesser extent by Louise throughout their testimonies. This discussion brings together the key findings for each of the super-ordinate themes, before culminating in an overall evaluation of the testimonies drawing from those four super-ordinate themes.

The term “digital native” is attributed to Prensky (2001) and is often applied to those born after 1980 (who are assumed to have a level of competency with computers, social media). In the context of these testimonies, this concept represents a focal point to assess the first super-ordinate theme “*The digital native vs. the digital immigrant*”. As a term, it is used to illustrate the willingness of each participant to identify with social media, highlighting how these individuals see the benefits of interactions with other users online, as well as assessing their perceptions of social media as a political forum. A series of subthemes were identified as part of the analysis and can be used to characterise and codify what constitutes “digital nativity” to these individuals, as well as how online engagement can be linked to their perception of politics. The aspects that invoke the concept of “digital native” more fully are the ability to evaluate, consolidate and assimilate information online from a number of sources and apply them to the political sphere in this instance. In addition, this information can also be used to challenge those that also inhabit the digital space, in a manner that



fosters the transmission of ideas, echoing Mill's (1947) concept of a market place of ideas, something that each of those interviewed highlights as important to them.

While only two participants (Teresa and Louise) strongly identify with the notion of a "digital nativity" and regularly engage with social media, there was a solidarity shared between all four participants and other users of social media. The identification with those of a similar age is accompanied by a distinct feeling of political abandonment and mistrust. These feelings exemplify the super-ordinate theme "*Solidarity online, alienation offline*". Louise's testimony cites this disenfranchisement associated with British youth (Armstrong, 2005; Henn, Weinstein & Forrest, 2005) most frequently and eloquently, making her the prime example of this sentiment. However, there is a clear disconnect highlighted by the testimonies that suggests an inability to relate to those in power and a desire to view social media as a platform for more divergent acts of politics- such as political consumerism, mirroring the findings of Copeland, (2013). However, this is only seen in Teresa and Louise's responses. Regardless, there appears to be a clear reduction in barriers to enter this particular political arena, given Peter and Chris' awareness of the potential to engage with the debate on social media. From the sampled testimonies, it seems that attempts to verify sources (e.g. accessing a variety of sources before coming to a conclusion on a topic) and a desire to be heard are a good indicator of engagement. However, there is also the secondary belief that those within the age group lack the required knowledge to engage fully with the constitutional methods often associated with politics, therefore reducing engagement with more conventional political behaviours. The four super-ordinate themes are prevalent throughout the individual testimonies and are used to address the three areas of interest; politics in general, the coverage of agenda-setting media organisations and the participant's engagement with social media.

The super-ordinate theme "*Legacy media as a method of government*" addresses the participant's engagement with agenda-setting media organisations. The theme focuses on aspects of the coverage of news; namely the prevalent perception that there is a distinct focus on negative reporting, due to the notion that bad news sells. This mirrors the findings of Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer and Vohs (2001) whose work titled "Bad is stronger than good" demonstrates the legacy news media's typical negative portrayal of various events, subcultures and even public officials (Kahn, n.d.; Lloyd, 2004). The idea of negative news also appears in the belief that these news organisations engage in scare-tactics and misinformation. The legacy media are seen to be subservient to the

government and operate as the mouth piece for parliament. Louise demonstrates this in her quote where she suggests that:

If the government own you and the government give you the money you are not going to put out something that slags off the government because you don't get the same amount of funding,

With the implication that this funding results in an obligation to present governmental policy favourably. The final component of this theme is the idea of mono-directional discourse. The one-way flow of information inherent in this concept appears to be most jarring for those identified as “digital natives”, as it inhibits their ability to challenge coverage and engage debate with other users and conduct their source verification procedures. Louise demonstrates this succinctly in her discussion regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

...when you have discussions, social media enters in, it is more the raw state, I think you actually get what the true news is or what the whole you know, interaction is at least.

The final theme to be addressed is “*Redefining the political dialogue?*” which pertains to the desire of the participants to engage in the political sphere. It is perhaps the most diverse super-ordinate theme and indicative of the group overall. However, its exploration of why some of the participants have resigned themselves to political apathy is potentially valuable, particularly in relation to those more politically minded. To this end, several participants repeatedly touched upon the difficulties with politics, Louise even goes as far as to state that “only really intelligent people have any particular interest [in politics] and maybe you are a little dry and boring if you want to post about the general election or something like that.”. However in his work, Prensky (2001) provides an interesting counterpoint (though situated in a different context) targeted directly at the population in question, in which he identifies that:

In geography – which is all but ignored these days – there is no reason that a generation that can memorize over 100 Pokémon characters with all their characteristics, history and evolution can't learn the names, populations, capitals and relationships of all the 101 nations in the world. It just depends on how it is presented. (p. 5)

This component of presentation appears to be the prime issue with regards to facilitating engagement and relates directly to the way in which agenda-setting media organisations present politically salient information. Therefore, by investigating how these participants perceive the distribution of political information online and the potential of the platform to operate as a means for direct democracy, it is possible to obtain some insight into how to foster greater political engagement offline. For example, steps could be taken to establish a bi-directional dialogue with those in power similar to those already

found on Twitter. The improved dialogue could be seen to facilitate greater political efficacy overall, due to the union of social and political spheres. As mentioned previously, the individual testimonies here are the most varied with regards to this theme, due to in part to the level of faith each participant has in the existing system, the preference for local politics and action, concerns regarding how the system could be changed and whose responsibility it is to usher in this change.

The results provide a number of insights in relation to key debates in the relevant literature, particularly that concerning the transition from traditional conceptions of political engagement to new forms of personal politics, such as political consumerism, as highlighted by Copeland (2014) and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013). The findings- when used in conjunction with Copeland (2014) and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013) work- allow for a dualistic understanding of youth engagement, simultaneously falling under the banner of apathetic youth held by Armstron (2005) and Esser and de Vreese (2007), as well as the empowered group pursuing politics in new and diverse ways (McIntyre, 2012). By bridging the gap between political literature concerning conventional political behaviours and youth literature, *Chapter 6* illustrates the importance of personalised politics to British youth (Bennett, 2012). That being said, real world youth mobilisation is problematic due to the changes in socialisation and interaction on social media (Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu & Sey, 2009; Holmes, 1999). Turkle (2011) highlights the potential support system represented by social media, though reiterates the same concern regarding the nature of youth socialisation, worrying that it may inhibit real life engagement in favour of online forays into the political realm.

Clearly, there are a number of concerns considering the continued downward trend of youth involvement offline, which the testimonies illustrate. Peter highlights a perceived obligation to vote and Louise is disillusioned with the politicians representing her. All of these can be seen to highlight the growing disengagement with traditional forms of politics (Armstron, 2005; Boulianne, 2009; Pasek, More & Romer, 2009). The growing disengagement also highlights further concerns that political consumerism, which is strongly associated with digital youth culture (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 2005) and shown clearly by Louise and Teresa, may develop divergent notions of citizenship (Livingstone, 2002; Miller & Shanks, 1996). Each individual testimony cites a concern over the future of digital citizenship, mirroring the work of Woo-Young (2005) and others worried that it will descend further into apathy. Alderman (1999) suggests the following (though recent political events such as the rise and fall of UKIP and the apparent return to two-party politics in the 2017

general election, necessitates the application of a critical lens when assessing the validity of this statement):

[the UK has] become two nations politically: on the one hand, that of two parties which continue to monopolize power at the parliamentary and governmental level and, on the other, that of the single issue groups and protest movements, whose membership has long since outstripped the active grassroots support the parties can call upon (p. 128)

These single-issue groups are illustrated time and again in Teresa's testimony, where they seek to challenge poor market practice, show support for charity, and lobby public officials in the manner suggested by Stolle et al. (who suggest these non-constitutional acts are an opportunity for individualised political action, 2005). One of the reasons cited by the wider literature regarding social media like Twitter and its contribution to the potential for mobilisation, concerns the strengthening of social bonds online, facilitating a sense of community and shared interest (Kenski & Stroud, 2006). These sentiments are frequently cited by Chris, who highlights the safety he feels online and how political figures are so distant. However, this debate is not settled, with some believing that the increasing reliance on social media may cause individuals to abandon their existing social environment (Nie & Erbring, 2000). Others highlight its potential to strengthen these social bonds (Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Turkle, 2011) as well as facilitate civic and political participation (Copeland, 2014; Fuchs, 2012). It is the strengthening of these bonds coupled with the trust in those they engage with online that might explain the greater sense of agency amongst some of the participants. Azjen (1991) and Bandura (2001) demonstrate how this solidarity might affect an individuals affect and beliefs, in turn impacting how likely someone is to engage in particular behaviours. As alluded to in *Section 6.3a* those experiencing greater solidarity online, and those more prepared to explore the information available to them, did express a greater sense of agency, though this is typically restricted to the online realm.

Turkle (2011) provides a caveat to the point made above, by suggesting that online socialisation may need to be tempered by real interaction. On the other hand, Youniss et al. (2002) notes that "political socialisation is not something that adults do to adolescents, it is something that youth do for themselves" (p. 133). This highlights the importance of youth led behaviours such as political consumerism, as it is indicative of true youth engagement (Gordon & Taft, 2010). Within the testimonies, there is a call for alternative forms of representation; as such there is the perception that "political parties in the UK have... been historically reluctant to engage with young people or represent their interests in the formulation of policies, instead prioritising older voters." (Mycock & Tonge, 2012;

p.138). This call for direct democracy does not appear to originate anywhere specifically but does suggest that there is a desire for political action to have a visible effect. Events such as the Scottish Referendum lend credibility to this statement, given the increased turnout (85%) and the increased engagement online in the run up to the vote, particularly in those within the target age bracket. Furthermore, Schuck & de Vreese (2011) account for the greater interest, by highlighting the clear correlation between the act of voting and the result. In doing so, they demonstrate the potential represented by referendums as a form of governance. This is a facet missing from representative democracy, which is clearly illustrated in the testimonies in relation to the Liberal Democrats “selling out” over student fees. To further support this need for perceived impact, there have been instances in which digital formats for voting and civic/political engagement have seen great success, particularly in Asia (Lin, Cheong, Kim & Jung, 2010; Woo-Young, 2005).

Within the sampled testimonies, there are those who suggest the British legacy media contributes significantly to public cynicism and maintenance of the current political elite through their coverage, maintaining the current level of apathy (Armstrong, 2005; Balmas, 2012; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Levy & Rickard, 1982). This is highlighted numerous times within the accounts of all four participants and its prominence is illustrated in the exploration of the first super-ordinate theme. Milbrath (1965) highlights the importance of the British legacy media in:

[continuing the] moral admonishment for citizens to become active in politics, not because we want or expect great masses of them to become active, but rather because the admonishment helps keep the system open and sustains the belief in the right of all to participate, which is an important norm governing the behaviour of political elites. (p. 162)

To this end, these testimonies can also be used to illustrate a number of psychological theories of culture transmission and assimilation; methods integral to quantifying the potential effects of social and legacy media on engagement and empowerment.

The importance of social norm transmission is highlighted by Amnå et al. (2009), Marcuse (1964) and Althusser (2014) regarding the political socialisation of youth through social institutions, as well as friends and family. This transmission is illustrated by Chris, who states that it is like people’s “morning coffee” to check social media and he wants to be involved, even if he only has a limited understanding of the topics covered; resulting in an awareness that he simply repeats what others have said. As identified by Bandura (2001), Jeannerod, (2003) and implied by Hewson (2010),

sociostructural influences represent a large contributor to perceptions of agency. These influences can be seen to be determined by their relationship to culture and its transmission between individuals within society. Lehman, Chiu and Schaller's (2004) interpretation of the role of culture in facilitating or inhibiting agency is a reciprocal one in which:

Psychological processes influence culture. Culture influences psychological processes. Individual thoughts and actions influence cultural norms and practices as they evolve over time, and these cultural norms and practices influences the thoughts and actions of individuals. (p. 689)

This quote could be compared with an early statement made by Siebert, Peterson & Schramm (1956) in which he states that the national press takes on the form and colouration of the social and political setting in which it is grounded. This is a reciprocal relationship; as highlighted by Freire (1970) and is not indicative of new forms of culture transmission online, considering the interchangeability of sender/receiver roles. Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory sees some support here, particularly in relation to the notion of in-group and out-group bias, with individual testimonies strongly identifying with others within their age group and those similarly disenfranchised with the current political system. There is also the belief that British politicians are out of touch or distant. This is exemplified by Louise's description of politics occurring in a "big building" somewhere and the challenge posed by Chris for those politicians to come see how he lives. The role of the British legacy media in this instance can be seen to foster a "hierarchy of credibility" in which youth is demonised for its involvement with non-constitutional forms of politics (Becker, 1967). Overall, this assertion places agenda-setting media organisations outside the jurisdiction of Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory, given their ability to create and manipulate group identification. This is demonstrated by Donson, Chesters, Welsh and Tickle (2004) in their paper concerning the coverage of anti-capitalist protests in London and Prague, and can applied to groups such as the British youth who believe themselves ostracised by the existing governmental system (Copeland, 2014; Sukarieh & Tannock, 2015), a point that is prominent amongst the four testimonies here and clearly something that impact their understanding of their own political agency.

The phenomenological perspective alone is limited with regards to answering each of the questions outlined in the opening of this thesis. However, its inclusion strengthens the multi-method approach advocated overall, providing depth and nuance, as suggested by Schrøder (2012). With this in mind, the application of the phenomenological perspective allows for an examination of subjective understanding of the experiential schemas adopted by the four participants sampled. Nevertheless, there are some limitations that could be addressed in future works. The first of these limitations

concerns the sample selection. While this is not explicitly an issue for the application of IPA, due to the focus on individual subjective experience, it does raise some issues for the following data chapter. The sample is diverse in terms of gender, though the distribution of further education is limited specifically to the women of the sample, restricting the comparison of the individual testimonies. Similarly, all participants originate from long-term Conservative constituencies, which may have had an impact on individual conceptions of political efficacy. As such, no real comparison can be drawn here; though the differences in behaviour suggest that these factors do influence the participants' perceptions of their own efficacy. The second limitation concerns the procedures undertaken during the analysis. While these techniques were exhaustive, they do exclude broader aspects of information and rely heavily on the double-hermeneutic of the IPA approach (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This hermeneutic is informed by the researcher and does not traditionally make use of *a priori* findings as is done in this thesis. Therefore, it is worth noting that, while the findings of the preceding research tier were not used to inform the analysis, the themes identified were based on their emergent properties. However, it cannot be assumed that some colouring from the previous method did not influence the double hermeneutic.

Given the importance of an individual's understanding of their own engagement and political agency, the application of IPA here provides novel insight into the role of various media formats on the formation of this understanding. This approach is unique in that it focuses on personal sense-making brought about by the direct involvement of the individual with both the political and media spheres, as well as allowing them to draw parallels between their own political beliefs and the impact of the media on these beliefs. These personal reflections highlight key points in time in which their understanding of their own political efficacy was formed or adapted. Furthermore, by bridging the gap between political literature concerning conventional political behaviours and youth literature, this chapter illustrates (within the context of this sample) the importance of personalised politics to British youth (Bennett, 2012; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle et al., 2009). The importance of personalised politics to young people can be seen to challenge conventional assessments of youth political engagement, fostering a dualistic understanding whereby young people can be both apathetic and politically motivated, based upon how they are presented within the national discourse (Bowman, 2014) and how the term "political" is defined.

In conclusion, this chapter- when taken in the wider context of the literature identified above- highlights the potential for constitutional mobilisation online. With this in mind, physical demonstrations of mobilisation occurring during the 2014 Scottish Referendum, during the London Riot clean-up in 2011 (Fuchs, 2012) and finally through e-participation as demonstrated by Woo-Young (2005) in South Korea, illustrate the potential for a wide variety of civic acts. However, this potential should be tempered with caution, considering that many social media platforms are still young. In addition, the nature of digital socialisation within this particular age group is still unrefined (Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu & Sey, 2009; Turkle, 2011) and as a whole, the platform may ultimately suffer the same fate as television (Groombridge, 1972). Despite this, the potential of social media cannot be denied, especially with regards to Britain's "disaffected" and "apathetic" youth. *Chapter 6* contributes primarily towards answering *RQ2: How is the use of legacy and social media linked to political engagement in the lived experience of media users?*, in that it illustrates how individuals place their trust in particular news platforms, as well as the defining moments in developing this trust. *Chapter 6* can also be seen to address *RQ3: Is there a measurable association between legacy and social media use, political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem among young people?*, in that it covers what it means to be a "digital native", what identification as a user of social media is and individual perceptions of how the platform can facilitate individual conceptions of political engagement.



## **Chapter 7: Quantifying young people's use of and attitudes towards social and legacy media**

The following chapter covers the final methodological tier, consisting of a questionnaire designed to explore young people's media use, as well as their attitudes, feelings and beliefs towards political engagement. *Section 7.1* provides context for the questionnaire study, highlighting the importance of the environment in predicting political engagement. In this discussion, the work of CIVICUS (2013) is of importance, given how the nature of censorship and civic obligation feature heavily within their Enabling Environment Index (EEI). The index highlights several concepts (such as "public attitudes and perceptions" and "communications and technology") central to any discussion relating to the impact of media distribution and content on engagement. *Section 7.1* concludes with a statement of hypotheses, emphasising the potential for demographic differences in terms of media uptake and usage. *Section 7.2* provides a breakdown of the measures that make up the survey as well as outlining the methods used during sampling and analysis. *Section 7.3* provides the results of the survey numerically, facilitating a discussion of the hypotheses in relation to the results of the chapter and wider literature in *Section 7.4*.

### **7.1: Discussing changes to young people's media use and the impact this may have on politics**

As stated in *Chapter 2*, the ways in which individuals consume media is changing; social media are becoming one of the primary sources for contemporary news as well as information on current events (Hansard Society, 2012; Pew Research Centre, 2013). This change is integral to any discussion of political engagement; it is only by understanding individual usage and engagement with a particular news platform that we are able to ascertain the importance of that platform in improving -or inhibiting- political engagement overall. The methods employed within this chapter seek to expand the work of Levy and Rickard (1982) and others (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenbauer & Vohs, 2001) regarding the impact of legacy media on political efficacy. This analysis contained in this chapter goes beyond these earlier works by adding Twitter coverage of current events to the assessment of media impact. By engaging with social and legacy media in this way, the results of this chapter seek to address *RQ3 (Is there a measurable association between legacy and social media use, political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem among young people?)*, whilst adding a quantitative assessment to the results of *Chapter 6*, which primarily concerns itself with *RQ2 (How is the use of legacy and social media linked to political engagement in the lived experience of media users?)*.

Twitter is particularly interesting to explore in the context of youth political engagement due to the significant uptake of the platform by those aged 18-25 (those typically considered apathetic; Armstrong, 2005; Macedo et al., 2005). Furthermore, the platform represents an opportunity for bi-directional discourse due to the interchangeability of sender/receiver roles, limiting ideological imposition (if you extend the assertions of Friere, 1970). It is this opportunity for an “alternative” discourse that distinguishes social media from legacy media, in that allows users to interact directly with content creators as they acquire the political knowledge required to engage (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996, Hochschild, 2010). The success of social media in achieving this has been demonstrated by Woo-Young (2005) in South Korea, in which young people can be seen to be a highly informed and mobile voice within the political sphere (as demonstrated by the use of *non-gaek* [polemicist] websites to discuss contemporary political events). Additionally, a similar trend is observed in the Netherlands as shown by the work of Bakker and de Vreese (2011).

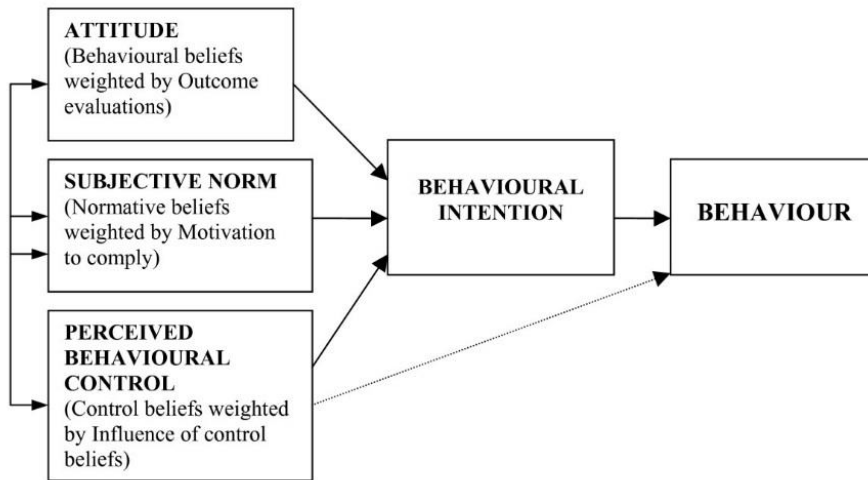
When exploring media usage and uptake, Blumler and Katz’s (1974) uses and gratification’s theory proves valuable as it can be applied to illustrate information seeking behaviours of users online and how social media may differ from other news disseminators with regards to its links to individual agency. Within the context of Blumler and Katz’s work, social media can be used in a number of ways; to socialise, to escape and to facilitate information gathering (among others). With this in mind, Burgess, Foth and Klæbe (2006) highlight how users of social media simultaneously create and adapt social and cultural norms within the network to suit their needs; be that socialising with those who share similar interests, seeking out information on current political events or grouping together to spoil their favourite TV show (Jenkins, 2006). The process of forming these groups is comparable to the methods of culture generation as illustrated by Latané (1996). From this assessment of youth behaviour online, it can be suggested that social media platforms like Twitter hold the potential for political mobilisation. This is most apparent when considering that socialisation online satisfies and enhances information gathering practices whilst fostering “political” engagement through the signing of petitions or engaging in boy/buycotts (Copeland, 2014). Based on these behaviours, it could be argued that political actions are being undertaken by British youth – despite the wider narrative within the literature suggesting they are uniformly apathetic – by way of these typically non-political means (which could be seen as an indication of an intent to act rather than direct action). Overall, this trend of youth political engagement online may mark a transitional period in which intent to act online shifts to observable political behaviours offline; a shift that would run contrary to the belief of Armstrong (2005) and Marcedo and Alex-Assensoh (2005) but in line with those arguing for distinct youth agency in the political realm (Copeland, 2013; McIntyre, 2012).

When bearing in mind the potential shift in how young people engage politically, it is vital that a more positive outlook is assumed in order to facilitate a more productive debate on the topic overall (particularly considering the broad narrative assuming youth apathy). The work of Macgilchrist (2007) demonstrates the potential benefit of creating a counter-discourse in this way. In her work she demonstrates how, by shifting the framing of a debate, this can facilitate a more positive outlook on a given event or group (the sample she illustrates this in relation to is the Russian-Chechen conflict, and the legacy media coverage of that event). This more positive outlook represents a divergence from Levy and Rickard's (1982) work which focuses on the idea of learned helplessness and low levels of engagement rather than agency and empowerment. To this end, this chapter employed a series of standardised measures designed to assess self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1979), self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), political efficacy (Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna & Mebane, 2009) and governmental trust (adapted from Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán's Brand Trust measure; 2000) in order to deconstruct the constituent components that predict behaviour within the context of Bandura (2001) and Jeannerod's (2003) definition of agency. The selection of these measures is based on how they link to one another semantically, and the relationships they share, as compartmentalised aspects of the models outlined by Ajzen (1991). Their application in an assessment of youth engagement represents a systematic attempt to generalise the findings of *Chapters 5 and 6*, whilst emphasising the importance of youth political efficacy. As such, these measures and their associated concepts are semantically linked to both Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory of mass communication and Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour; these links are covered in the following paragraph.

With regards to the application of Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory of mass communication and Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behaviour it has been noted that some of the selected standardised measures are linked to agency (which represents a central tenant within the argument presented in the current work). The remainder of this section illustrates how these measures link to agency and to one another and how they can be applied to both Bandura's (2001) and more specifically Ajzen's (1991) theories. The inclusion of both self-esteem and self-efficacy is based upon the notable correlation between the two measures (i.e. those scoring highly on measures of self-esteem frequently demonstrate similarly high scores in measures of self-efficacy, Judge & Bono, 2001; Tharenou, 1979); in addition to the prediction that greater levels of both self-esteem and self-efficacy would translate to greater political efficacy. When considering the semantic links between self-esteem and self-efficacy, it is expected that this correlation will be replicated with political efficacy. When applying the selected standardised measures to Ajzen's (1991) model (see *Figure 7.1*)

they can be seen to map onto several of the internal predictors (for more detail on how these constructs are mapped onto the theory of planned behaviour, see *Section 3.4*).

*Figure 7.1: Tiers of the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)*



Governmental trust can be seen to be tied to Azjen’s attitudinal node within *Figure 7.1*. The link between this node (which represents an assessment of previous behavioural outcomes) and trust as a concept provides the justification for adapting Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán’s (2000) original brand trust measure to one concerning trust in government. The measure itself highlights the impact of outcome evaluations based on the previous experience of a purchasing product, or in the case of the adapted measure, voting for a particular party. It is expected that those individuals who felt as though they were misrepresented during the 2010 General Election by the Liberal Democrats would be likely to either not vote at all, or vote for an alternative party demonstrating the impact of behavioural control on political agency. This decision may be influenced by the other two internal regulators of behaviour.

The first of these internal regulators are the subjective norms illustrated by the legacy media in their coverage of British youth. These norms are frequently seen to mirror Armstron’s (2005) assertion that British young people are apathetic or at least disinterested in traditional forms of politics. The effect of youth representation in this manner is shown by Levy and Rickard (1982) to affect perceived control, fostering feelings of ineffectuality. The presence of this negative portrayal is noted within *Chapter’s 4* and *5* of this thesis. The second internal regulator is that of perceived behavioural control, which predicts self-efficacy and political efficacy as it represents an individual’s sense of agency, their ability to achieve a desired goal (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The reason for

applying Ajzen's (1991) model here rather than Bandura's (2001) is based on the way each of the internal measures feed through into behavioural intention. Semantically, the influencing factors are similar across both models but where Ajzen's model is presented as a progression from internal factors to observed behaviour, Bandura's highlights the interconnectedness of internal influences and behavioural outcomes. The benefit of Ajzen's layout over Bandura's, is that it provides narrative structure that can be used to link the qualitative findings of *Chapter 6* to the results of this one.

The analysis in this chapter seeks to explore three main hypotheses, linked to the research questions outlined at the beginning of this section. The first of these - based on the work of Castells et al., (2009), the Hansard Society (2012) and Pew Research Centre (2013) - suggests that there will be notable differences in how the various types of media are used and conceptions of political efficacy and governmental trust between men and women (which is supported by the results and discussion contained in *Section 6.4*). Secondly, it is hypothesised that legacy media platforms- in particular broadsheets- will remain as some of the most influential and trusted sources for news on current events (Cohen, 1963; Coleman, McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2009; Fuchs & Pfetsch, 1996; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006), indicated by positive evaluation of their distributed content even amongst those who are not regular consumers. However, a rise in importance of social media is expected, as shown by the findings of the Hansard Society audit (2012) and the work of the Pew Research Centre (2013). The final hypothesis predicts that social media use stands to have some impact on a variety of media related behaviours (such as fact checking and critique) which impact political discourse and by extension, political efficacy. Importantly, this hypothesis places greater emphasis on traditional political behaviours due to the inclusion of Caprara et al.'s (2009) political efficacy measure. Whilst this does not exclude a discussion of non-constitutional political behaviours, it means that the discussion will rely more heavily on the results obtained from alternative question batteries such as the more general self-efficacy measure (Schwarzer & Jerusalem; 1995).

## **7.2: Constructing and disseminating the questionnaire: Defining sample selection**

### *Participants*

233 subjects were recruited using opportunity sampling online via social media and the BlackBoard student interface. The questionnaire was administered using the online survey system Qualtrics throughout November 2015. This approach to recruitment allowed for a large number of participants to be sampled, whilst ensuring that all adhered to required demographic criteria.

However, due to the incomplete nature of some of the responses, 23 participants were removed from the analysis, leaving a final count of 210 (18-25 years old,  $M = 20$ ;  $S.D. = 2.16$ , British Nationals). The sample itself consisted of a greater proportion of women (76%) to men (24%). While there are limitations associated with assumed level of education and gender, the sample serves to exemplify a portion of the target group. Though the gender imbalance could be perceived as an issue, the sample remains sufficient to ascertain broad trends in engagement within this particular population. Participants were involved voluntarily and were not offered any compensation for their involvement.

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire consisted of 58 questions assessing a series of standardised and non-standardised measures (See *Appendix 4*). Beyond the initial five consent and demographic questions, the measures were randomised, with some skipping to later parts of the questionnaire (based on earlier answer selection) in order to remove fatigue effects. The comprehensive list of standardised measures and their justifications are covered in *Section 3.4*, though a brief summary is included here, providing internal reliability measures from the current study where appropriate.

### *Governmental Trust*

A nine-item scale was adapted from Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán's (2000) original brand trust measure and consisted of a five-point Likert type scale ranging from *not at all true* to *exactly true*. Sample questions include *The British Government would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns* and *With the British Government I obtain what I look for in Politics*. Internal reliability was recorded as  $\alpha = .828$ .

### *Self-Efficacy*

A ten-item scale representing Schwarzer and Jerusalem's (1995) original measure with no amendments were included to assess an individual's belief in their own capabilities. The scale consisted of a four-point Likert type scale ranging from *not at all true* to *exactly true*. Sample questions include *I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough* and *I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I rely on my coping abilities*. Internal reliability was recorded as  $\alpha = .870$ .

### *Self-Esteem*

A ten-item scale representing Rosenberg's (1979) original measure was included in order to assess an individual's perception of their own self-worth. This scale consisted of a five-point Likert scale labelled from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, and sample questions include *On the whole, I am satisfied with myself* and *I feel I do not have much to be proud of*. Internal reliability was recorded as  $\alpha=.879$ .

### *Political Efficacy*

A ten-item scale representing Caprara et al.'s (2009) development of Acock, Clarke and Stewart's (1985) and Neimi et al.'s (1991) original political efficacy measures was included to assess efficacy with regards to "traditional" political behaviours. This scale consisted of a five-point Likert scale labelled from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, with sample questions including *I am able to make certain that the political representatives you voted for honour their commitments to the electorate*. Internal reliability was recorded as  $\alpha=.858$ .

### *Non-Standardised Measures*

The remaining measures focused on demographic information such as age and gender as well as media usage. A second series of measures was included in order to explore media satisfaction; these were derived from the battery of questions employed by the Hansard Society audit (2012). Sample questions include *"In a TYPICAL day how many hours do you spend doing the following? (Use social media, read a newspaper, etc)"* and *"How satisfied are you with the way the media reports politics in the UK?"* Due to the incongruent nature of these measures, internal reliability cannot be assessed (see Section 7.3).

### *Procedure*

The questionnaire link was distributed online via social media and through the BlackBoard student interface, inviting those who matched the target demographic to participate in a study exploring civic and political engagement. Upon opening the survey link, each participant was provided with a covering consent page outlining the purpose of the questionnaire, as well as an opportunity to demonstrate informed consent via a series of check boxes. These check boxes also included

confirmation of age and nationality, in order to validate the sample. Contact information was provided in order to allow participants who wished to be removed from the analysis or ask further questions to contact the researcher.

### *Ethics*

The data collection and analysis conformed to Canterbury Christ Church University's code of ethics, by way of a cover sheet attached to the first page of the questionnaire, making participants aware of the purpose of the questionnaire and their right to withdraw. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, as no names were requested at the point of selection. In addition, all respondents were provided a unique code, making identification impossible.

### **7.3: Methods of analysis and statistical results**

In the following section, the analysis is broken down into three main subsections. The first of these subsections focuses predominantly on descriptive statistics and describes broad patterns of media use (including a brief comparison between male and female users given the availability of the data), overall satisfaction with the reporting of current events by various media outlets and perceptions of the media more widely. The second subsection delves deeper by looking at correlations between the standardised measures that make up the main body of the questionnaire. The correlational analyses contained here are grouped around particular variables to aid clarity. The Likert type scales used in the analysis were treated as interval level scales, despite the ordinal nature of the point labels. Justification for doing so was based on statements made by Allen and Seaman (2007) who suggest that the "intervalness" of the scales is an emergent property of the data, rather than the labels themselves, and as such, could be used in this manner- providing the scales contain at least five categories. These correlations were used to establish whether there was a measurable association between media use (specifically legacy and social media), political efficacy, self-efficacy and self-esteem, before expanding to encompass related measures such as media satisfaction and governmental trust. The final subsection saw various behaviours associated with media usage (daily social media use, discussions of current events with friends, TV watching and daily newspaper reading) entered into a series of stepwise regressions with the aim of generating a model explaining their relative contribution in predicting political efficacy, self-efficacy and governmental trust. Stepwise regression was used in this instance over structural equation modelling and hierarchical regression for two main reasons. Firstly, the data collected was unsuitable for structural equation modelling given

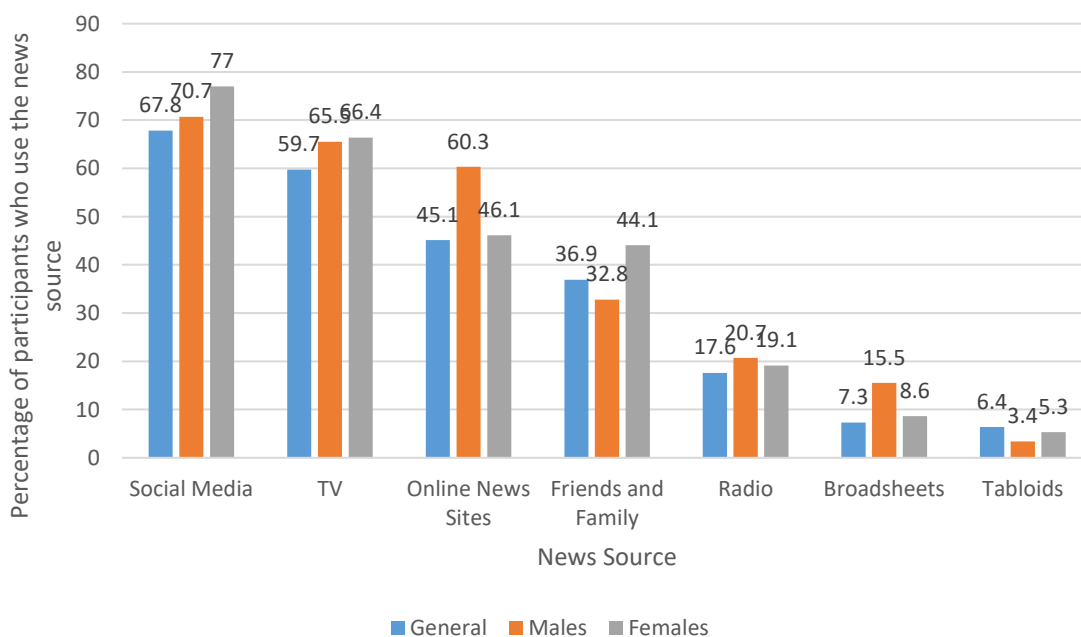


the lack of breadth in measures and the need for more direct comparisons of all types of media usage; which is beyond the scope of the current work. Secondly, while it was predicted that there would likely be a dominant contributor (either social media, based on the uptake of young people or legacy media based on the position of the wider literature), there was limited theoretical reason for prioritising one over the other. Additionally, because of the assumed importance of social or legacy media, the measures were not simply added as a singular block.

### Descriptives

The analysis of the descriptive statistics focused mainly on the non-standardised measures derived from the Hansard Society audit (2012). Beginning with *Figure 7.2* below, the relative popularity of the media platforms are illustrated in terms of the sampled population as a whole, in addition to male and female responses. From these results, the primacy of social media as a news source is apparent, closely followed by television. By comparison, broadsheets and tabloids represent the least popular sources of news amongst those sampled. For the most part the users of particular media platforms seem comparable across gender with the exception of “Online News Sites”, “Family and Friends” and “Broadsheets” in which men and women appear to differ in their uptake.

*Figure 7.2: Most popular news sources breakdown*



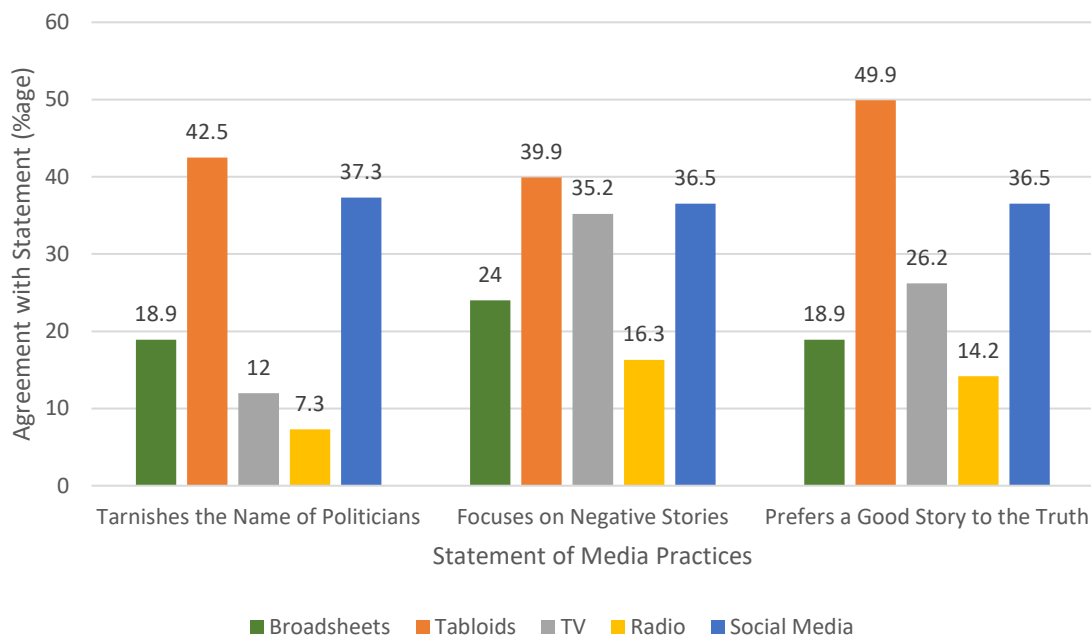
Beyond media popularity, the measures taken from the Hansard Society audit (2012) also explored media satisfaction in addition to the most frequently cited reasons for that dis/satisfaction. Overall, 40.3% of the sample was dissatisfied with media coverage of current events as a whole (an assessment that included all of the media sources cited in *Figure 7.2*), which contrasts with the 14.6% reporting satisfaction. This trend was mirrored by the male responses (55.2% are dissatisfied with media coverage of current events) when the sample was split by gender, though when applied to the female responses, ambivalence towards the coverage was the most predominant response (45.8%). The most common justification for this dissatisfaction was that media organisations “do not present the full facts” (47.2%) when covering current events. Additionally, there appeared to be the belief that many of these media organisations engage in “scaremongering” (36.9%) and often “lack a balanced view” (36.5%). Remaining concerns previously identified by the audit (Hansard Society, 2012) and tested here included “lack of clarity” (13.7%), “no positive news” (24.5%) and the use of “overly technical language” (11.6%) but were less frequently cited as causes for dissatisfaction, even when the sample was split by gender. This suggests that the initial three causes for concern represent the most pertinent justifications for dissatisfaction across platforms covered in *Figure 7.2*.

In addition to supplying questions categorising the broad reasons for media dissatisfaction, the Hansard Society audit (2012) provided three statements representing frequently cited beliefs relating to the behaviour of various media organisations in their coverage of current events. These statements were “They look to tarnish the names of politicians”, “They focus on negative stories about politics and politicians” and “They are more interested in a getting a good story than telling the truth”. The participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which they believed the above statements were true of the following media platforms; broadsheets, tabloids, television, radio and social media; the results of which are presented in *Figure 7.3*.

From *Figure 7.3*, it is apparent that tabloid newspapers are frequently believed to engage in all three behaviours, in particular favouring “good stories” over the truth. This belief is also true of social media and -to a lesser extent- television amongst those sampled. By comparison, of the five assessed media platforms, radio could be argued to represent the most trusted format, given that it is seen to engage in these behaviours the least frequently. The results of these non-standardised measures are important in that they illustrate the reactions of users based on their experiences with a particular media platform. Additionally, these quantitative results contribute to the qualitative assessment made in *Chapter 6* regarding RQ2 (*How is the use of legacy and social media linked to*

political engagement in the lived experience of media users?) by aiding generalisability. Based on the notable similarity in how those sampled perceived tabloids and social media across the three statements, a series of logistical regressions were added to the battery of correlational tests conducted in the subsection below in order to evaluate the validity of that assessment. Furthermore, the means and standard deviations of all standardised and non-standardised measures are provided in *Table 7.1*, which also features in the following subsection.

Figure 7.3: Common beliefs associated with media practices compared across platform



### Correlations between measures

The present subsection focuses specifically on identifying the correlations between usage, media satisfaction, and gender in addition to the standardised measures covered in *Section 3.4* and *Section 7.2*. *Table 7.1* below provides the bivariate correlations of each of the standardised measures. From the table, it can be seen that social media use correlates with a number of other usage behaviours (Discuss current events with friends and TV usage) and governmental trust, suggesting that engagement with online media has the potential to promote the discussion of politics, given the moderate positive correlation. This trend is also shown in daily newspaper reading, but in addition to correlating with governmental trust, a positive relationship is seen with regards to political efficacy. Discussing current events with friends appears to be an important facet of political engagement when noting the positive correlations with both governmental trust and political efficacy; this result mirrors

some of the findings discussed in *Section 6.4*. From these results, it is important to note that governmental trust is shown to have a minor positive correlation with both political efficacy and time spent discussing current events with friends. These results contradict some of the findings of the wider literature concerning the belief that young people are sceptical of politicians and the political process (Henn & Foard, 2011), though a more detailed assessment of this result is conducted in *Section 7.4*.

Building upon the results illustrated in *Table 7.1* and the earlier descriptive statistics (which suggest that social media and online legacy formats see greater attention and popularity than their traditional print formats in terms of their coverage of current events), a series of independent samples t-tests were undertaken. These t-tests were conducted in order to ascertain whether gender had a significant effect on this popularity (based on recorded usage) and on time spent discussing current events. The first of these t-tests sought to evaluate the effect of gender on time spent using social media (Men  $M = 3.35$ ,  $S.D. = 2.712$ ; Women  $M = 4.83$ ,  $S.D. = 3.013$ ) the results of which are shown here  $t(178) = -3.022$ ,  $p = .003$  and suggest a notable difference in how much time men and women spend using social media. However, when the same independent samples t-test was applied to assess whether there were gender differences in the time spent reading newspapers (Men  $M = .81$ ,  $S.D. = .703$ ; Women  $M = .96$ ,  $S.D. = 1.724$ )  $t(103) = -.477$ ,  $p = .634$ , or discussing current events with friends (Men  $M = 1.86$ ,  $S.D. = 1.567$ ; Women  $M = 1.87$ ,  $S.D. = 1.884$ )  $t(159) = -.039$ ,  $p = .969$ , the same trend was not replicated. The only marginal difference recorded concerned the time spent watching TV (Men  $M = 2.44$ ,  $S.D. = 2.218$ ; Women  $M = 3.19$ ,  $S.D. = 2.238$ )  $t(157) = -1.876$ ,  $p = .062$ . These results suggest that women are more likely to spend more time using social media than men and that time spent reading newspapers is low across both genders, a statement that can also be made of time spent discussing current events.

Moving on from media usage, a second battery of independent samples t-tests were completed in order to assess gender differences in governmental trust and political efficacy. The first of these indicated a significant difference in governmental trust between men ( $M = 2.73$ ;  $S.D. = .578$ ) and women ( $M = 2.99$ ;  $S.D. = .670$ ),  $t(161) = -2.375$ ,  $p = .019$ , suggesting that the women sampled were more inclined to trust the government than their male counterparts. A second t-test compared political efficacy with the male and female responses. Again, the results indicated a significant difference in political efficacy between men ( $M = 2.65$ ;  $S.D. = .663$ ) and women ( $M = 2.91$ ;  $S.D. = .600$ ),  $t(153) = -2.298$ ,  $p = .023$ , which as before, suggests that the women sampled exhibit greater scores in political efficacy than the men. However, this refers almost exclusively to traditional political

behaviours given the use of Caprara et al.'s (2009) measure. These results, which illustrate greater governmental trust and political efficacy in women, provide quantitative support for the experiential accounts explored in *Chapter 6*.

The battery of correlational tests above concluded with an attempt to validate the assertion that tabloids and social media share a similar reputation amongst those sampled in relation to their percentage agreement with the two of the statements posed by the Hansard Society (2012) shown in *Figure 7.3*. A series of logistical regressions were used to test this assessment with the social media response as the dependant variable. The responses to the same statement for the other media platforms were used as predictors. The models outlined below detail this analysis and represent a transition from the correlational tests to the regressions that conclude *Section 7.3*.

The first model focused on the first statement that “[the media] look to tarnish the names of politicians” and compared the full model to a constant only model. This demonstrated that the predictors as a set reliably predicted the social media output, as shown here  $\chi^2(4, N=233) = 69.17, p < .01$ . The Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of .35 indicated a weak to moderate relationship between prediction and grouping. Prediction success overall was 73% (69.0% for agree and 75.3% for disagree). The Wald criterion demonstrated that broadsheets ( $p = .02$ ), tabloids ( $p = .013$ ) and radio ( $p = .03$ ) all were significant predictors of the social media response. However, the impact of tabloids was the most apparent. Exp(B) value indicates that when those sampled disagree the odds ratio is close to zero, suggesting that positive responses to “They look to tarnish the names of politicians” regarding other media predicts a negative response in relation to social media.

The second model assessed the second statement that “[the media] are more interested in a getting a good story than telling the truth” and compared the full model to a constant only model which demonstrated that the predictors as a set reliably predicted the social media output as shown here  $\chi^2(4, N=233) = 96.20, p < .01$ . The Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of .46 indicated moderate relationship between prediction and grouping. Prediction success overall was 78% (87.1% for agree and 72.3% for disagree). The Wald criterion demonstrated that, tabloids ( $p < .01$ ) and radio ( $p = .04$ ) were significant predictors of the social media response. However, as before the impact of tabloids was the most apparent given the comparative difference between the Wald criterions. The Exp(B) value for both predictors demonstrated the same effect as the previous model suggesting that positive responses to “They are

more interested in a getting a good story than telling the truth” regarding other media predicts a negative response in relation to social media.

Table 7.1: Table of descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations

	Daily Usage Social Media (Hours) (M = 4.43; S.D. =3.00)	Daily Usage Newspaper (Hours) (M = .91; S.D. =1.49),	Discuss Current Events with Friends (Hours) (M = 1.87; S.D. =1.80)	Daily Usage TV (Hours) (M = 2.99; S.D. =2.25)	Media Satisfaction (M = 3.49; S.D. =1.24)	Governmental Trust (M = 2.92; S.D. =.656)	Political Efficacy (M = 2.84; S.D. =.626)	Self Efficacy (M = 2.66; S.D. =.506)	Self-Esteem (M = 3.21; S.D. =.705)
Daily Usage Social Media	-	$r(105) = .177, p = .071$	$r(161) = .257, p < .001^*$	$r(162) = .465, p = .001^*$	$r(180) = .144, p = .053$	$r(162) = .171, p = .029^*$	$r(154) = .085, p = .296$	$r(160) = -.033, p = .681$	$r(126) = -.157, p = .080$
Daily Usage Newspaper	-	-	$r(99) = .622, p < .001^*$	$r(101) = .294, p = .003^*$	$r(105) = .128, p = .194$	$r(95) = .211, p = .04^*$	$r(88) = .386, p < .001^*$	$r(92) = .167, p = .122$	$r(75) = -.002, p = .983$
Discuss Current Events with Friends	-	-	-	$r(145) = .287, p < .001^*$	$r(161) = -.018, p = .817$	$r(146) = .167, p = .044^*$	$r(138) = .290, p = .001^*$	$r(144) = .132, p = .116$	$r(111) = -.119, p = .212$
Daily Usage TV	-	-	-	-	$r(159) = .093, p = .243$	$r(144) = .124, p = .140$	$r(136) = .183, p = .033^*$	$r(141) = .038, p = .654$	$r(115) = -.021, p = .822$
Media Satisfaction	-	-	-	-	-	$r(163) = .032, p = .684$	$r(155) = .052, p = .521$	$r(161) = .203, p = .010^*$	$r(143) = .055, p = .143$
Governmental Trust	-	-	-	-	-	-	$r(155) = .467, p < .001^*$	$r(157) = .155, p = .052$	$r(115) = .038, p = .686$
Political Efficacy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	$r(155) = .225, p = .005^*$	$r(112) = .933, p = .112$
Self Efficacy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	$r(116) = .131, p = .161$
Self-Esteem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

### Stepwise Regression

As outlined at the beginning of *Section 7.3*, the analysis contained in the following subsection sees the variables daily social media use, discussions of current events with friends, TV watching and daily newspaper reading entered into a series of stepwise regressions. The aim of these stepwise regressions was to generate a model explaining their relative contributions in predicting political efficacy, self-efficacy and governmental trust. The reason for conducting the analysis in this way was based upon the work of Hochschild (2010), who suggests that media use can be seen to predict political engagement, which is operationalised here using the political efficacy, self-efficacy and governmental trust measures. Originally, media satisfaction was also intended to be added to these models but was shown to only have any predictive power in relation to self-efficacy, based on a preliminary assessment of the measure,  $F(1,159)=6.801$ ,  $p=.01$  which, with an  $R$  value of .203, accounted for 4.1% of the variance, suggesting that it had only a very minor impact; as such, this variable was excluded from all stepwise regressions.

### Political efficacy

At step 1 of the stepwise regression, the measure “daily newspaper reading” was entered into the model and was shown to be significantly related to “political efficacy”  $F(1, 78)$ , 14.456,  $P<.001$ . The multiple correlation coefficient was .395, indicating approximately 15.6% of the variance in “political efficacy” is accounted for by “daily newspaper reading”. The remaining measures were not entered into the model during step 2, hence its exclusion for the table below. Given the inability of the remaining measure to explain the remaining variance in “daily social media use”, ( $t= .675$ ,  $p=.502$ ; discussions with friends and family,  $t=1.308$   $p=.195$ ; TV watching,  $t= .448$   $p=.656$ ), “daily newspaper reading” represents the most reliable predictor of political efficacy from amongst the assessed measures.

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE b</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>Step 1</i>			
<i>Constant</i>	2.817	.070	
<i>Daily Newspaper Readership</i>	.138	.036	.395*

Note.  $R^2 = .156$  for Step 1. \*  $p<.001$



### Governmental trust

At step 1 of the stepwise regression, the measure “daily discussions of current events” was entered into the model and was shown to be significantly related to “governmental trust”  $F(1, 85), 7.761, P=.007$ . The multiple correlation coefficient was .289, indicating approximately 8.4% of the variance in political efficacy is accounted for in these daily discussions. The remaining measures did not enter into the equation during step 2 (daily social media use,  $t= .883, p=.380$ ; daily newspaper reading,  $t=.411 p=.682$ ; TV watching,  $t= -.059 p=.953$ ), suggesting that frequent “discussions of current events” account for the greatest variance when predicting governmental trust of the assessed measures.

	B	SE b	B
<i>Step 1</i>			
Constant	2.708	.098	
Daily Discussions of Current Events	.094	.034	.289**

Note.  $R^2 = .084$  for Step 1. \*\*  $p<.01$

### Self-Efficacy

For “self-efficacy”, no variables were added to the equation during step 1 leading to the assertion that none of the usage variables represent accurate predictions of self-efficacy (as they do not account for enough variance to within the model). This suggests that there may in fact be alternative explanations predicting “self-efficacy” that were not tested in this instance. As such, no predictive regression equation could be generated.

### Self-Esteem

Given the lack of any correlation with any of the identified measures (See Table 7.1), the stepwise-regression for “self-esteem” was not completed.

## 7.4: Elaborating on the statistics: a discussion of the results

The questionnaire employed in this chapter sought to address three main hypotheses, each relating to a particular facet of RQ2 or RQ3. The first hypothesis posited that there would be notable differences in how men and women use different types of media, their individual political efficacy and

their trust in the government. The second suggested that legacy media platforms - in particular broadsheets - would remain as some of the most influential and trusted sources for news on current events. The third and final hypothesis predicted that social media use would have some impact on a variety of media related behaviours, impacting both political discourse and political efficacy. The following section addresses these hypotheses systematically, highlighting key results and illustrating how these in turn inform our understanding of the outlined research questions.

In addressing the first hypothesis, it can be argued that there are two main results. The first is found amongst the initial descriptive statistics and t-tests, and suggests that there was no significant difference in media source preference across gender, though minor differences in social media usage were recorded. These minor differences were also seen in how men and women evaluated their own satisfaction with the media they were consuming, with men typically being less satisfied with the media's coverage of current events than the women. These demographic differences lend support to the findings of the Ofcom media use and attitudes report (2016) and the work of Courtois, Merchant, De Marez and Verleye (2009), who found similar discrepancies between the genders in terms of social media use and only minor differentiation on preferred media platform overall. However, it is important to note that other demographic differences - such as socio-economic status and technical competency - were not addressed and may account for the findings of the Hansard Society (2012) and Courtois et al. (2009). The second result of importance when addressing the first hypothesis concerns the gender differences noted in the assessment of the standardised measures. The gender comparisons in the analysis contained above focused predominantly on governmental trust and political efficacy, considering how these two measures feature heavily in the discussion of individual agency. These results demonstrated that of the participants sampled, the women were more inclined to trust the government and exhibited a greater degree of political efficacy when compared to the men. However, when considering the emphasis placed on Caprara et al.'s (2009) political efficacy measure within the questionnaire, it is assumed that this result is a better representation of traditional political engagement than perhaps engagement more widely. Support for interpreting the importance of political efficacy and governmental trust in this case is derived from Bandura's social cognitive theory of mass communication (2001) and Azjen's theory of planned behaviour (1991). In these theories, governmental trust can be seen to represent a prediction of continued support independent of gender, particularly when taken in the context of the traditional "political" behaviours (Strømsnes, 2009). The strength of this assertion is based upon the adaptation of Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán's (2000) brand trust measure into that of a governmental trust measure. With the adaptation of this brand trust measure in mind, it becomes possible to draw parallels with advertising and brand

support behaviours that feature heavily in both Azjen's (1991) and Bandura's (2001) models and the analysis conducted here. Furthermore, the governmental trust measure itself can be more effectively linked to the political efficacy measure provided by Caprara et al. (2009), when taking into account the focus on politics over repeat purchasing of domestic goods.

Addressing the second hypothesis is simpler than the first and can - as with the first hypothesis - be done by drawing upon two key results. The first is illustrated in *Figure 7.2* where the primacy of social media as a favoured news source is apparent. However, this result goes beyond simply stating the importance of social media as a news source amongst the sampled young people. *Figure 7.3*, illustrates that while social media is popular amongst young people as a news source, its reputation is comparable to tabloid journalism in terms of media satisfaction. This assessment was made based on the statements provided by the Hansard Society (2012) pertaining to frequently cited beliefs relating to the behaviour of various media organisations in their coverage of current events and supported by the results of a pair of logistical regressions. These statements were "*They look to tarnish the names of politicians*", "*They focus on negative stories about politics and politicians*" and "*They are more interested in a getting a good story than telling the truth*". The comparison between social media and legacy media (specifically tabloid newspapers in this case), was in some ways unsurprising. When taking into account the nature of discussions online, the emphasis on negative portrayals of politicians is familiar, considering the tendency of the platform to mirror the legacy media in terms of style and content (Howard, 2012). This claim that social media mirrors legacy media in terms of style and content, was alluded to in the testimonies of *Chapter 6*. This trend is predicted by Prensky's (2001) work concerning "digital natives", whereby he suggests that this age group is more likely to take up the social media over other formats, due to the role information technologies have had during their formative years. As such, British youth are likely to differ from the older demographics that are more present in the Ofcom market report (2015) and Hansard Society audit (2012).

The second key result makes greater reference to the wider literature and *Chapter 6* and *Section 2.1* by building upon Prensky's (2001) concept of "digital nativity" and the preference young people have for the platform. It can be argued that some of social media's shortfalls are accounted for by its ability to be used as a tool for creating groups based around shared values, each with their own cultural norms. This idea is explored in depth by a number of the participants in *Chapter 6* who acknowledge that, whilst legacy media is a "good" way to keep up with current events, social media is their "preferred" way, given their ability to interact with like-minded individuals and see alternative

viewpoints. It is the ability to interact with these groups that appears to be important, considering the capability of these groups to foster greater self-esteem and efficacy (Turkle 2011) making the platforms on which these groups exist more than simple news aggregators or disseminators (Burgess et al. 2006).

The third hypothesis relates to usage trends and can be seen to directly link to RQ3. The results of this chapter illustrate how media use can be seen to correlate with both political efficacy and governmental trust. There is however an important caveat to this, in that not all types of usage promote an improvement across all standardised measures. For example, social media use was shown to have a minor positive correlation with governmental trust, whereas TV usage does not. Identifying the differing impact of media type shown here, is supported by Kruikemeier and Shah (2017), who during their panel study demonstrated how media consumption (both in terms of type and volume) could be seen to affect political interest, intention to engage and overall agency. Additionally, the correlation shown between discussions of current events and governmental trust may be mediated by social media as a communication tool, as each of the participants within the IPA tier highlight this as one of their primary reasons for engaging with the medium. Furthermore, due to limited amount of variance explained in predicting governmental trust, there are likely additional predictors that have not been accounted for in this analysis. Turkle's (2011) work relating to the enhancement of self-esteem online is valuable in this context, when taking into account the relationship frequently cited between self-esteem and self-efficacy. However, in the analysis of this method, the relationship does not extend to political efficacy, despite the correlation between self-efficacy and political efficacy. When considering Bandura's (2002) social cognitive theory of mass communication, it would be expected that enhancements to self-esteem in relation to online media usage would result in similar trends in political and self-efficacy.

One justification for the limited impact of social media on political efficacy within this instance may derive from the cultural impact of norm transmission- as shown in *Section 2.4*- given the presence of legacy media organisations on social media. The limited impact may be due to the power imbalance between legacy media as producers and the involvement of grass-roots users (Fuchs, 2014). As alluded to previously, a greater focus was placed on constitutional forms of engagement within the questionnaire, due to the inclusion of Caprara et al's (2009) political efficacy measure. This may have primed the importance of traditional political behaviours, such as voting (Boulianne, 2009; Pasek, More & Romer, 2009) which, when coupled with the digital presence of legacy media systems, may

also devalue or simply not measure non-constitutional forms of engagement indicative of the medium (Donson, Chesters, Welsh & Tickle, 2004; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 2005). Continuing the exploration of the effect of usage on the sampled standardised measures, the impact of legacy media within the political discourse can be seen, when considering the links between media usage and both governmental trust and political efficacy. From this, it is apparent that legacy formats- whilst dwindling in readership- still maintain a significant impact on understanding politics and associated political behaviour. This reinforces their importance as primary agenda setters (Fuchs & Pfetsch, 1996; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006).

The results emphasise the importance of discussing current events with friends. When based on the Enabling Environment Index provided by CIVICUS (2013), and the predisposition of British youth towards politics, many of their socio-political attitudes are skewed by the existing legacy media (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) and reinforced by secondary institutions such as schools, familial relations and friends (Althusser, 2014; Amnå, Ekström, Kerr & Stattin, 2009; Marcuse, 1964). The weighting attributed to this form of socialisation may provide some justification for the lack of a significant correlation between social media use and political and self-efficacy. Furthermore, the coverage of current events online by legacy media organisations may simply reinforce particular social norms (such as youth apathy). These norms are then repeated and strengthened through interactions with the social institutions and groups highlighted above, leading to a replication of that apathy, and by extension, low political efficacy. However, the literature does not agree on this point, with some suggesting that the legacy media has only a very limited impact on these norms, considering that users tend not to share these posts whilst online (Hsu, Park & Park, 2013). The results of this chapter are unable to determine the exact nature of the discussions had online and because of this, two points worthy of further consideration are raised. The first concerns whether the conversations taking place online are devoted to meaningful discussion of policy or whether they serve as “water-cooler topics”, as predicted by Marcuse (1964). The second point asks whether social media use and daily discussions of current events confound one another, because some of these discussions may be mediated by online systems.

There are several limitations worth addressing when discussing the application of the questionnaire method. The first two pertain to the nature of the sample and selected measures specifically with the third focusing on the employed analytic techniques and the potential impact on the results of the chapter. Firstly, the concerns surrounding participant recruitment arise from the use

of opportunity sampling which draws heavily from a university population and is skewed in favour of female participants as well as those currently working towards the acquisition of an undergraduate degree. However, it is important to note that while the sample was primarily recruited via a university student interface (Blackboard) this was not the sole avenue of recruitment. Invitations to take part were also distributed via social media (Twitter and Facebook). Although the limitations here should be obvious, the sample could be argued to reflect -at least in part- the desired population. However, due to the inability to ascertain the exact ratio of students to non-students, there is an impact on the wider generalisability of the findings, particularly considering the potential impact of education on political engagement as alluded to in *Chapter 6*. Furthermore, the emphasis on undergraduates also provides its own challenges, particularly in the light of the result of the IPA interviews, in which social media usage was seen to vary amongst those attended university and those who did not. Moreover, errors here may also be compounded based on a lack of clarity of what daily social media use is and whether their daily discussions of current events should be included if conducted on the platform. Overall, this suggests there may be some wider differences within the population at large that were not assessed as a result of the sample or interpretation of the measures. That being said, future research should ensure a more representative sample in order to ensure the generalisability of the findings as a whole.

As stated, the second limitation concerns the inclusion of Caprara et al.'s (2009) measure of political efficacy. As highlighted in *Section 3.4*, this measure focuses exclusively on constitutional aspects of political efficacy, namely traditional "political" behaviours such as voting and party membership, as highlighted by Strømsnes (2009). In doing this, the measure largely ignores non-constitutional aspects of political efficacy and political behaviours that are frequently associated with young people such as boycotts, lobbies and demonstrations (Copeland, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle et al., 2005). The reason for including this measure is due to a lack of measures that encompass both constitutional and non-constitutional behaviours. Acock, Clarke and Stewart's (1985) original measure again shares this same limitation but with lower reliability than Caprara et al.'s (2009) measure. As such, future applications of this method should seek to employ measures that assess political efficacy outside of the traditional political behaviours. They should focus to some degree on non-constitutional forms of engagement or acts of political consumerism, when considering the emphasis placed on these forms in the earlier chapters of this thesis.

To support the integrity of this chapter's analysis, the following paragraph seeks to address the use of gender in the analysis and the need to replace structural equation modelling with stepwise regression. Firstly, the issue of including gender as part of the analysis is more to do with clarity than to do with errors in the data or in the application of the methods. What is meant by this, is that gender was not identified as a variable of note during the design phase of the method but was included in order to provide salient demographic information. That being said, *Chapter 6* highlighted a potential gender discrepancy in media use and overall political engagement that was worthy of exploration in a more quantitative sense here, considering the availability of the data.

Ultimately, while gender differences do not represent significant focus of this thesis an assessment of their contribution to the topic at hand seemed worthwhile when combined with the other analyses conducted as part of this chapter. By comparison, the application of stepwise regression over structural equation modelling requires more explanation, and a brief justification for this change was provided in *Section 7.3*. This justification hinged on the belief that there was insufficient breadth within the data to support the theoretical approach required of structural equation modelling. Additionally, concerns of a lack of breadth were compounded by contradictions between the testimonies of *Chapter 6* and the wider literature concerning the primacy of legacy media; because of this, stepwise regression was employed rather than hierarchical regression as neither legacy or social media could be prioritised over the other. However, it is acknowledged that structural equation modelling would be a valuable means of evaluating media impact on political engagement. Unfortunately, this is beyond the scope of the current work considering time constraints and the possibility that this line of inquiry could generate a thesis in its own right.

Overall, the findings illustrate the primacy of social media as a source of information on current events for British young people. However, while this primacy is apparent, it does not necessarily translate to an increase in political engagement or sense of agency as predicted by the standardised measures. The importance of discussing political events with peers has been under-represented in previous chapters, given their focus on young people's engagement with media. However, the results of this chapter here can be seen to fall in line with the work of both Amnå et al. (2009) and Althusser (2014) in terms of political socialisation, making up for the narrow exploration earlier. As such, these findings suggest that the target population is not as disinterested in politics as Armstron (2005) postulates and may simply reflect a shifting focus towards individualised lifestyle choices, as predicted by Copeland (2014), Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013) and Stolle et al. (2005). However,

this is not particularly well assessed in this sample due to the focus on traditional conceptions of “political” actions (Strømsnes, 2009), as a result of the inclusion of Caprara et al.’s (2009) political efficacy measure. The findings of this chapter provide empirical support for some of the experiences highlighted by those interviewed in *Chapter 6*; such as the belief that young people as a group have been disregarded or abandoned politically (which could have marked effect individual agency given the impact on attitudinal beliefs and affect; Azjen, 1991). The final methodological tier is integral in answering *RQ2 (How is the use of legacy and social media linked to political engagement in the lived experience of media users?)* in that it shows that various usage behaviours are linked with governmental trust and political efficacy. Furthermore, it also provides notable insight into *RQ3 (Is there a measurable association between legacy and social media use, political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem among young people?)*.



## Chapter 8: Discussing the impact of media on youth political engagement

The following chapter provides an overview of the findings of the thesis, highlighting their relation to the literature identified in earlier chapters, and the research questions originally stated in *Section 1.2*. Overall, the aim of this chapter is to use these results to examine the impact of social and legacy media on British young people's political engagement as well as the associated attitudes, feelings and beliefs. *Section 8.1* outlines the originality of the work both in terms of design and in the emphasis placed on the experiences of the young people involved. The section concludes by consolidating the results of all three data chapters, with the aim of identifying any underlying relationships between them. These results are explored in relation to the research questions sequentially via a series of subsections (*Subsections 8.1a – 8.1c*). *Section 8.1a* sees the results of *Chapter 5* explored in conjunction with the wider literature and those of *Chapter 4*, in order to discuss the first research question (*How do legacy and social media differ in their coverage of political events?*). *Section 8.1b* will follow the same approach -though draws more heavily from the findings of *Chapters 6 and 7*- with the aim of addressing the second research question (*How is the use of legacy and social media linked to political engagement in the lived experience of media users?*). By drawing on these particular chapters, both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used. The synthesis of these approaches allows for a more nuanced understanding of an individual's involvement with both politics and the media. *Section 8.1c* concludes the initial discussion of the results and focuses on the third research question (*Is there a measurable association between legacy and social media use, political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem among young people?*). In addressing this final research question, the overall impact of social media on political engagement will be evaluated, taking into account features of the media landscape identified by the wider literature, the influence of the legacy media, and the attitudes and feelings held by young people. *Section 8.2* provides a reflection on the methodology employed by this thesis, highlighting potential limitations and identifying areas in which this approach could be developed in future work. This chapter concludes in *Section 8.3* which firstly provides a summary of the findings as a whole, reiterating the originality of the work, before attempting to evaluate the implications of these findings for media usage and its impact on political engagement overall.

### 8.1: The mixed methods approach: Consolidating the findings

As was stated in *Chapter 3*, this thesis employed a mixed-methods approach. This was done for two main reasons; firstly, to allow for both quantitative and qualitative methods to be used in

concert, and secondly, to aid in integrating the contributions of psychology, media studies and political communication on which this work draws from. The interdisciplinary, mixed-methods approach was vital in generating the results that are discussed in this chapter, but also in ensuring that the young people who took part were able to have their voice heard. Traditionally, young people's feelings towards, as well as engagement with social media and politics have been studied with mono-methodological approaches; thus this study provides useful and novel insights in the field. This section will firstly provide an overall comparison of the results obtained from *Chapters 5, 6 and 7*, before highlighting the three main findings of the thesis as a whole.

From the results of *Chapter 5* and *Chapter 6*, it can be argued that one of the key results is that social media are often more diverse in their coverage of current events and more facilitatory towards ongoing political engagement- both constitutional and non-constitutional. The experiences of the individuals interviewed highlighted that social media often offers a different perspective to that of the legacy media and that engagement with other users allows them to find their own place within the story. The testimonies highlight how a different understanding of an event is achieved through interaction with a variety of people who do not necessarily share the same worldview. The importance of interactions with "different" worldviews and perceptions of an event was highlighted by Mill (1947) who suggested that it is the collision with falsehood or truth that allows us to improve our own understanding. When taken in the context of political engagement this interaction could be seen to facilitate the acquisition of salient political knowledge (due to exposure to a variety of perspectives), and improve both political efficacy and engagement due to the greater understanding of one's role within society (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochschild, 2010; Mill, 1947; van Dijk, 1998).

Online communities and digital socialisation emerged as key concepts relating to young people's political engagement and attitudes in *Chapter 6*. These are concepts that can be linked to the continuing debate within the literature surrounding the perceived impact of an increasingly digital social sphere (Turkle, 2011). Furthermore, the frequent reference to the perception of community online in the interviews highlights these concepts as topics of interest for those directly involved. Some academics suggest that the increasing reliance on social media to mediate friendships may cause individuals to abandon their existing social environment (Nie & Ebring, 2000), which would clearly impact offline engagement. Others however, suggest the inverse, in that the wider reach of online systems such as Twitter, as well as the ability to identify with similarly minded individuals like the politically disenfranchised, may help to facilitate civic and political mobilisation (Anderson, 2003;

Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Holmes, 1999; Wellman & Hampton, 1999). The experiences of those interviewed in *Chapter 6* go some way to validating this assessment, with supplementary support being provided by the results of *Chapter 7*. The findings of these chapters illustrate the link between social media usage, governmental trust and increased political agency. Furthermore, the results of *Chapter 7*- in conjunction with the work of Amnå, Ekström, Kerr and Stattin (2009)- highlight the importance of friends, family and other groups both online and offline. These results reinforce the position established by Althusser (2014) regarding the replication of dominant ideologies (or social norms) through secondary feedback loops associated with particular mechanisms of ideological control.

Based on the results of the individual chapters outlined above, there are three main findings of this thesis, each of which can be seen to relate to one of the three research questions (though not exclusively). The first finding relates to the way in which media platforms distribute information, with the results of *Chapter 5* suggesting that there are notable differences in how social and legacy media engage in this process. From these findings and those of *Chapter 6* it can be argued that the legacy media can be seen to reappropriate or recontextualise events to reaffirm the dominant ideology and desired engagement format, affecting individual agency in the process. On the other hand, social media appears to organise itself around a loose hub and spoke network that facilitates the exchange of values and ideas between groups on a more horizontal axis (McQuail, 2002; Park, Lim & Park, 2015).

The second finding confirms the increasing primacy of social media and contextualises this rise in relation to increased levels of trust in the platform and solidarity felt with those online. These sentiments are particularly evident in the IPA interviews of *Chapter 6*, which not only highlights this trust but also illustrates a wariness shared by all of those interviewed as to its shortfalls (concerns over security etc.). These qualitative assessments of social media's worth were supplemented by the results of the questionnaire in *Chapter 7* which found that social media use affected governmental trust and was significantly correlated with other behaviours associated with increased engagement, such as discussing current events with friends. The findings of these chapters suggest multi-directional interaction online contributes to an increase in solidarity and socialisation, as predicted by Turkle (2011). Furthermore, the socialisation and increased solidarity can be seen to foster more divergent political actions, such as boycotts and buycotts (Copeland, 2014; Gil De Zúñiga, Copeland & Bimber, 2013), where unknown individuals are trusted to assist in lobbying against single-focus issues; this is most notably illustrated by the experiences of Louise and Teresa in *Chapter 6* and finds further support

in Azjen's (1991) and Bandura's (2001) behavioural models (which demonstrate how these constituent components feed into the expression of agency).

The third finding of the thesis suggests that many of the young people sampled believe there is a barrier to entry with regards to "politics" in the traditional sense. *Chapters 6* and *7* were the prime contributors to this assessment, given how they illustrate low political efficacy and only limited interest in politics through their testimonies (*Chapter 6*) or through quantitative assessments of that efficacy (*Chapter 7*). Based on the results of *Chapter 6*, it would appear that this belief is rooted in their previous experiences of voting and their coverage in the legacy media (or lack thereof). Additionally, the decrease in turnout for constitutional politics is coupled by a notable upswing in non-constitutional forms of engagement.

When taken together, the findings of this thesis begin to outline the potential of social media as a news disseminator and facilitator of political engagement, though future research is required to fully develop this understanding. The findings also emphasise the importance of agency in predicting engagement. The application of Azjen (1991) and Bandura's (2001) behavioural models and Blumler and Katz' (1974) uses and gratifications theory demonstrate how the activities undertaken by those interviewed in *Chapter 6* influence their own feelings of competency and solidarity and in turn how the platforms they chose to engage with help them achieve these desires, political or not. The following subsections explore each research question in turn, drawing on the findings of each chapter and the wider literature in an attempt to provide an answer.

#### *8.1a: How do legacy and social media differ in their coverage of political events?*

Beginning with the results of the preliminary content analysis, the four cases explored in *Chapter 4* identify a number of trends relating to story focus and reporting styles in legacy media coverage. These case studies highlight differences in the coverage of constitutional, non-constitutional and political consumer events by the British legacy media. In the case of explicitly non-constitutional stories such as the coverage of Occupy: Parliament Square, the focus is placed on "illicit" activities such as the arrests of activists -rather than on the purpose of the event overall- highlighting an attempt by the legacy media to reappropriate or recontextualise the event. In this case, the reappropriation of the event was done in two ways; firstly, through implication of criminality, and secondly through the abstraction of the event, limiting the agency of those involved. The emphasis on criminality resulted

from the repeated reference to arrests of several demonstrators and the lengths taken to protect grass of Parliament Square from the demonstrators by the police. In doing so, the legacy media coverage of the event neglected the demonstrations original purpose - the reclamation of the democratic process. Levy and Rickard (1982) suggest that:

[media coverage of political events by the legacy media is often] highly dramatic, [focusing on] conflict orientated messages that emphasise and exaggerate the inability of individuals to predict and control their own lives. (p.1)

When applying the same critical lens to the acts of political consumerism associated with the Anti-Fracking campaign, the exploration of British legacy media coverage highlights an existing narrative based on the political, economic and international impact of a Fracking ban (within the context of the upcoming General Election), rather than one addressing the concerns of the electorate directly. The coverage of non-constitutional political consumer acts in the legacy media (notably the Anti-Fracking campaign) highlighted the rising importance of "*life-style based*" politics in and amongst the politically disenfranchised (Ward & de Vreese, 2011). In this context, Ward and de Vreese -among others (Copeland, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al.; 2013)- emphasise young people's affinity for socially responsible consumption of resources and these type of political consumer acts. Given how the coverage of the Anti-Fracking campaign by the legacy media avoids mentioning this age group and those concerned about the safety of the Fracking process, the potential to limit the political capital of these groups is apparent. The limiting of political capital and exclusion from the general debate stands to have a significant impact on the sense of agency felt by those within that group. In fact, the concern that British young people are unwanted in politics is a theme that arises during the interviews and represents one of the main reasons many claim a lack of interest in traditional politics.

In contrast to the non-constitutional cases, the reporting on both of the constitutional cases (British General Election and the Scottish Referendum) by the legacy media was notably more detailed. However, there was a distinct emphasis on conflict within the coverage, as predicted by Levy and Rickard (1982) and Chomsky (2003). Based on both the limited sample of each case and the comparison between these cases, it could be argued that the narrative conflict found within the legacy media coverage of these topics was generated in a similar manner to that of the non-constitutional events (notably the Anti-Fracking campaign). As such, the coverage can be seen to emphasise the impotence of key politicians (like David Cameron) when attempting to reconcile significant policy issues (such as EU membership in the case of the General Election or Shale gas extraction in the case

of the Anti-Fracking campaign). The coverage of both constitutional cases drew heavily from external sources for their information. In the case of the British General Election, this was presumably done in order to maintain a degree of impartiality. However, this impartiality was not as widespread in the coverage of the Scottish Referendum, which saw greater reliance on information derived from the political parties themselves and an emphasis on the maintenance of the political union between England and Scotland.

With the context provided by *Chapter 4* in mind; *Chapter 5* sought to explore the differences in the coverage of constitutional and non-constitutional political events by the social and legacy media. The analysis of *Chapter 5* built upon the exploratory analysis of *Chapter 4* and utilised computer-mediated methods to delve deeper into the coverage. Perhaps the most notable result was the emphasis on criminality in the coverage of the legacy media, particularly in those cases concerning non-constitutional events. This reliance on criminality was similarly replicated online, as shown by the word frequencies and co-occurrence networks. However, there was an important caveat. Online coverage remained closer to the original intention of the event in question, affording greater time to its discussion than the legacy media – which in the case of Occupy: Parliament Square, concerned the reclamation of the democratic process.

It is important to reiterate that an understanding of legacy media practices was essential to understanding social media strategies used by these organisations. As such, literature concerning the tendency of grass-roots content creators to mirror press styles and techniques features heavily in the discussion of the results (Kwak, Lee, Park & Moon, 2010; Papcharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). The replication of legacy media content online is expected when considering their presence as content creators. *Chapter 5* highlighted how grass-roots content creators (specifically those not employed by legacy media organisations) differ to their legacy media counterparts. For example, from the sampled Twitter feeds, where there was a significant focus on key individuals, they were either seen to be directly related to the event (e.g. attending the protests) or disseminating information and facilitating debate, in the manner suggested by Park, Lim and Park (2015). By comparison, in the legacy media coverage, these key individuals were often referred to indirectly or portrayed as inept or incompetent, particularly in the case of Nick Clegg (Lichter, Lichter & Amundson, 2000), or xenophobic in the case of Nigel Farage and UKIP (Moy, Xenos & Hess, 2006). This type of negative portrayal was illustrated in relation to the coverage of both constitutional and non-constitutional events in *Chapter 4* and was predicted by both Levy and Rickard (1982) and Baumeister et al. (2001).

The negative portrayal of key figures by British legacy media is in distinct opposition to coverage sourced online. On social media, key actors were not often the focus of the story, though become notable due to their ability to foster the debate around the topic. In the case of Occupy: Parliament Square, one of the key facilitators of the debate surrounding the event was the comedian Russell Brand, (Under the Twitter username @RustyRockets); the second was Jenny Jones of the Green Party. McQuail's (2002) democratic participation model can be used to illustrate how when key individuals focus on providing a "true" rendition of an event, they aggregate coverage derived from a number of content creators and reinforce a narrative that is laterally sourced and limits "elite" interference. While McQuail's assertion is not directly applied to social media in his work, it is easily transposed to the format - particularly given the work of Park et al. (2015). Extending the commentary regarding McQuail's (2002) democratic participation model, Park, et al. (2015) suggest that one of the notable differences between social and legacy media is the ability of social media platforms to facilitate the exchange of values and ideas between groups along a distinctly horizontal axis. The extent to which these platforms are truly horizontal is up for debate and requires additional research; particularly considering that those such as Fuchs (2014) emphasise the existence of distinct power imbalances both in terms of the volume of content produced and in terms of impact.

Unlike the agenda-setting media, social media formats such as Twitter are not explicitly news platforms and as such, do not adhere to certain aspects of the journalistic ideal (such as the desire to provide a public service). Many people utilise the platform as an opportunity to keep in touch with friends and family, in addition to keeping up with current events. This assessment of social media finds considerable support within the testimonies of the IPA interviews in *Chapter 6*. The departure from what could be termed as traditional journalism is seen in two main ways. This departure is seen firstly in the instantaneity of the format as Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliviera (2012) term it, and secondly in the potential attributed to Twitter regarding the possibility for political discourse free from ideological imposition (due to the emotive and reactive nature of the reporting on the platform). However, it is important to emphasise the term "potential" in this case, as research into social media is still relatively new.

The instantaneity of the social media platform highlighted by Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliviera (2012) is perhaps the most apparent difference and the one that is prompting the most significant changes in the legacy media online. Farhi (2009) has noted a number of occasions in which the legacy media has been unable to keep up with the grass-roots reporting of users in the vicinity of

any particular event. This delay is most apparent during coverage of disasters, riots and political events; a finding which is supported by Papacharissi (2010) and Howard (2011) in their work on the Arab Spring. The lack of success seen by legacy media organisations on this front is due to their preference for premeditated construction of stories. This limits their reactive and instant potential, leaving the format incapable of developing a fully sourced story in a time frame expected by users (Grusin, 2010). The resulting content derived from social media is less objective, more personal and frequently facilitated by key individuals within the debate (such as Russell Brand) as shown by the comparison of the two platforms in *Chapter 5*. Additionally, this assessment is touched upon by Teresa to some degree in her testimony in *Chapter 6* when she suggests that by interacting with others online one is better placed to keep up with world events, particularly if they are not important enough to warrant national news coverage.

The departure from traditional journalistic practices outlined above brings us to the second point outlined by Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012), concerning the potential of social media (in particular Twitter) to represent a platform free from the ideological imposition. As mentioned earlier, news transmission is not the primary purpose of the platform and for most people it is a method for maintaining contact with friends and family as well as for work and professional purposes, which is highlighted by the testimonies of *Chapter 6* - in particular, the account of Peter. This is problematic for the notion of a place where discourse could take place free from the dominant ideology. Based on the work of Althusser (2014), the dominant ideology is more frequently replicated through interaction with secondary institutions such as schools, familial relations and friends rather than explicitly reading legacy media. Althusser's suggestion means that online interaction may in fact aid in the imposition of the dominant ideology. Furthermore, the assumption of equal power relations across the network that is assumed by both Jenkins, Li, Kauskopf and Green (2009) and Carpentier (2011) finds little support within the wider literature and in the results of *Chapter 7*. This is particularly apparent when considering the mirroring of press techniques online and the number of links to legacy news organisations highlighted in *Figures 5.1* and *5.3*. The mirroring of legacy media styles and coverage (shown in *Chapter 5*) is amplified by the echo chamber represented by friends and family. Fuchs (2014), while critical of the assumed equality of the media online suggested by Carpentier, (2011), provides some theoretical grounding for the empirical results obtained from the content analysis. His work supports results contained within *Chapter 5* that identified the use of minority influence techniques in the Twitter coverage of Occupy. These techniques include an emphasis on argument coherence and the focus on particular aims or aspects of coverage (as seen by the repetition of the events original intent and the emphasis on democracy). These techniques strengthen the



ideological position of those disseminating stories relating to current events laterally and on a small scale, when compared to the legacy media.

The flexibility of the format and the focus on personalisation and collective control (Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Qiu & Choi Sey 2009) may facilitate the bi-directional discourse between major political actors and young people (though not exclusively) advocated by Freire (1970). Ultimately, the nature of grass-roots reporting on Twitter stands to have a significant impact on individual agency, due to diversity of the stories covered. This diversity is touched upon in the comparisons of *Chapter 5* and in Teresa's testimony. However, this must be tempered by the assertions made by Althusser (2014), regarding the impact of various social structures on ideological imposition. That being said, Redden (2001) suggests that media platforms favouring horizontal methods of transmission (like social media) may be able to mitigate the impact of more dominant voices (Fuchs, 2014), rather than silence them. This diversity of coverage fosters a debate comparable to that envisioned by Mill (1947), in which the increased solidarity felt online (and illustrated by the testimonies *Chapter 6*) as well as the greater potential for mobilisation of youth groups (Theocharis, 2012; Turkle, 2011), can be realised.

*8.1b: How is the use of legacy and social media linked to political engagement in the lived experience of media users?*

In addressing the second research question, the analysis of *Chapter 7* found that engagement online affects trust in both social and legacy media respectively, as well as indicating a greater intent to engage politically through constitutional or non-constitutional means. To this end, the following section seeks to illustrate how by drawing on the testimonies obtained as part of *Chapter 6* (which demonstrate individual experiences of trust in these platforms and how that in turn affects attitudes, feelings and beliefs towards political engagement) and by using the quantitative results of the questionnaire employed in *Chapter 7* (and those of the wider literature), there is support for this finding.

*Chapter 6* highlights a difference in usage and affinity for social media amongst the four participants interviewed, with only Louise and Teresa strongly identifying with the notion of being a "digital native" (Prensky, 2001) and engaging regularly online. Despite this, there was a notable solidarity felt by all of those interviewed with their conversational partners online and with those people disenfranchised with a system that they believe to have little interest in them. This solidarity

represents a central theme across all testimonies when it comes to each person's experience online. Turkle (2011) suggests that the ability of digital technologies to facilitate this sense of solidarity is important, as it allows for self-disclosure in a controlled environment. Chris and Teresa both emphasise the security felt when interacting with others online, whereas Peter and Louise are more cautious in how truthful people's online personas can be. When addressing engagement with legacy media, all of those interviewed stress some unease in trusting news organisations to provide the whole truth, though the extent of this trust varied.

The notion of trust is raised repeatedly in the interviews, both to refer to the validity of information and the perceived safety of a platform. Unsurprisingly, those spending more time online (based on the testimonies of Louise and Teresa in *Chapter 6*) were more likely to trust social media (notably Twitter), expounding their virtues as platforms for free speech, in addition to demonstrating a greater awareness of good digital practice (fact checking etc.) as users of these platforms (van Duersen, 2010). With this in mind, Peter and Chris both demonstrated limited engagement overall with social media, which in turn appeared to impact their trust in platforms like Twitter. Their more sceptical approach to social media and limited engagement with the platform could be seen to reinforce their belief that they are restricted in the extent to which they can influence politics (potentially due to their lack of exposure to political discourse online). From this, it is apparent that the men sampled within *Chapter 6* had a tendency to adhere to more conventional conceptions of what could be considered political (particularly in the case of Peter as seen in *Section 6.3*) and exhibit greater levels of trust in legacy media, when compared to Louise and Teresa.

Within the context of *Chapter's 6* and *7* and the wider literature, a few trends in news construction and distribution can be identified that could be argued to predict greater trust in social media. Firstly, the tendency of social media to emphasise the role of key content creators/hub individuals within the debate online is supported by the work of Choi and Park (2014). They suggest that the platform allows for these key users to not only disseminate important information, such as dates (which is also apparent in the content derived about constitutional events) or locations, but to motivate others in order to foster a greater debate online as well as collective action offline (Copeland, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013). This personality-focused distribution method allows for greater in-group identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Simply put, individuals know where their news is coming from and are capable of interacting directly with that source. This idea is replicated amongst the testimonies of *Chapter 6*, and illustrated here by this quote from Teresa.

I think there is enough of a voice from, from everybody that is on the social media platform in question, to provide sort of the opposing viewpoint, rather than mainstream media, where if you read a newspaper, and you're reading an article on X, Y or Z, that says, that presents a story, it will present it in that one way, it may present it reasonably neutrally, but that isn't necessarily... obviously then representative of the viewpoints. Obviously if they present the news story in that way you are reading it passively and you have no interaction with that... with the writer or with the source, or with the story in general... it's very one way, whereas with social media you can generate a two way dialogue, either with the, with the original company that has written it, or the person that has written it, or the people around you, the people that are potentially involved in that situation.

Social interaction appears to be the key component in generating "trust" in a platform. It represents a logical predictor of political engagement; as shown by the ability of users such as Russell Brand (@RustyRockets) to facilitate discussion, as shown by the Twitter analysis conducted in *Chapter 5*. Jenkins (2006) emphasises the need to trust these other users if any action is to be taken on their advice. Jenkins suggests the extent to which an individual trusts a content producer is based on their reputation and previous "correctness"; he uses the "Survivor" spoiler threads to illustrate this point. The fact checking practices that assess the worth of these hub individuals (Park et al., 2015) are an important facet of Prensky's (2001) "digital nativity" and are illustrated in the testimonies of Louise and Teresa.

*Chapter 7* highlights a few caveats that influence the original understanding of usage and affinity identified in *Chapter 6*. The results of *Chapter 7* suggest that rather than women, it is men that are more inclined towards seeking out information on current events through online news sites. This was demonstrated within the testimonies of *Chapter 6*, though superficially and without any indication that either Chris or Peter engaged in the same fact-checking procedures employed by both Louise and Teresa. Furthermore, more specific correlations demonstrate a difference in daily social media usage between men and women, with women typically spending more time online than men. This finding is carried over to television, though this is only marginal; suggesting that women source information on current events differently and through a greater variety of sources when compared to men. It could be argued that the gender difference in media usage may explain the greater trust in legacy media coverage (exhibited in the testimonies of Chris and Peter), particularly as it appears to illustrate a lack of engagement with more nuanced discussions of constitutional and non-constitutional events online. Taking a more quantitative focus, daily social media use was seen to elicit a minor positive impact on governmental trust, as shown by the findings of *Chapter 7*. However, this

same trend is also predicted by time spent reading newspapers. With this in mind, it must be said that newspaper readership is significantly lower than the number of social media users among those sampled, suggesting this may in fact be a politically motivated minority rather than representative of the population overall.

Returning to the discussion of grass-roots content creators covered earlier, it is worth addressing Fuchs' (2014) concerns regarding the presence of large media organisations on the platform. Hsu, Park and Park (2013) provided some contradictory evidence within the context of South Korea's political debates and discussions online. Their findings support the work of Jenkins et al. (2009), Carpentier (2011) and Castells et al. (2009); in that power relations between legacy media organisations and grass-roots content creators are more equal. While media organisations are amongst the most dominant actors online (in terms of distributing information on current events), their tweets are unlikely to be circulated by other users, particularly in the case of non-constitutional coverage or topics considered contentious by legacy news organisations (Grosek & Tandoc, 2016). This lends support to the manifestation of in-group identification online, particularly considering the generation of digital cultures by its users (Burgess, Foth & Klæbe, 2006) in a manner that mirrors the work of Latané (1996). To elaborate, Burgess et al. (2006) highlights the practice of digital culture generation, where the production of creative content surrounding current events, communication and interaction represents a shift in the way individuals conceive their own identity, both politically and socially. This digital identity is frequently cited by both Teresa and Louise in their testimonies in *Chapter 6* and is alluded to by the comparisons undertaken in *Chapter 7*. The strengthening of various social relationships online and creation of a digital identity is something that is also touched on by the men sampled in *Chapter 6*, though to a lesser degree. The strengthening of these social ties can be seen to facilitate a sense of community based around shared interest (Kenski & Stroud, 2006), improving self-esteem and efficacy.

By shifting away from a more homogenous public sphere mediated by legacy media formats, online discussions appear to originate from a more heterogeneous cultural sphere, in which culture and political knowledge are transmitted through frequent engagement with social media. This assessment appears to represent the primary difference between legacy media coverage and the user-generated content formulated online. Furthermore, it certainly appears to mesh with the comments made by those interviewed in *Chapter 6*, in particular Louise and Teresa who appreciate having access to a variety of social groups online. Furthermore, the creation of diverse online cultures in this manner

finds significant support amongst the work by Latané (1996), Prensky (2001), Copeland (2014), and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013). However, while this approach is more positive in its outlook than Fuchs' (2014), it does not address the concerns highlighted by Levy and Rickard (1982) relating to the transmission of messages that generate feelings of helplessness and ineffectuality (which do exist in the digital format due to the mirroring of traditional media techniques, Howard, 2011). In addition, it does not mitigate the potential negative impact of this sort of socialisation on offline engagement which is alluded to in *Chapter 6* in Peters account, but covered in greater depth by Holmes (1999) and Turkle (2011). The factors addressed here; the sense of solidarity, trust in the medium and its users and the belief that one can affect change, can all be seen to feed into a general sense of agency (Bandura, 2001; Jeannerod, 2003). It can be argued that given both Louise and Teresa's technical competency and inclination to reflect positively on times in which they challenged issues important to them (poor customer service etc.) they demonstrate greater levels of efficacy and political agency than Chris and Peter; leading to an important side note. Burgess et al. (2006) suggests that there is a uniform uptake of these online formats; but the results of the IPA interviews and questionnaire indicate that this is simply not the case. The questionnaire demonstrates not only differences in the uptake of social media but that men and women use it differently, with men seeking out information from online news sites rather than other grass-roots users; an assessment which was illustrated by the individual testimonies of *Chapter 6*.

The results of *Chapter 5* suggest that the coverage obtained via Twitter is somewhat more diverse than that provided by the legacy media. This may result from the loose hub and spoke network used during dissemination, as suggested by Park et al. (2015); in which information is organised by a few central users within the network and that these users bridge the gaps between small communities. The notion of a hub and spoke network finds some support in the role these networks play in the coverage of non-constitutional events such as the Arab Spring (Howard, 2011; Papacharissi, 2010) and in the discussion surrounding the Occupy: Parliament Square movement. Overall, it could be argued that this may provide a narrative account of all salient components of a story, emphasising affective accounts through the distribution of grass-roots interpretations of the event over those of legacy media formats (Hsu et al., 2013). Furthermore, the diversity represented by this coverage implies that there may be a less stringent adherence to traditional conceptions of politics, allowing for non-constitutional forms of engagement like the Occupy demonstration and acts of political consumerism to gain ground with the users in the network as illustrated by Copeland, (2013) and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2013). However, this same diversity is still seen in coverage of constitutional events, with the same hub and spoke network still apparent. Ultimately, the notion that social media coverage

of political events allows the “readership” to find their own place in the story is supported by the testimonies of *Chapter 6*. In these accounts, the participants suggest that by directly interacting with content creators they trust and by seeking out additional information, they can supplement their own understanding of the main story and feel more involved.

*8.1c: Is there a measurable association between legacy and social media use, political efficacy, self-efficacy and self-esteem?*

The third research question is perhaps the most problematic in terms of answering directly, as the analysis indicates more information is needed in order to fully unpack the impact of media use on political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. The following section highlights the contribution of *Chapters 6 and 7*, demonstrating how the results aid in addressing this question. Reference is made to *Chapters 4 and 5*, though this is primarily done to contextualise the findings of the later chapters.

Beginning with the results of *Chapter 7*, there are useful statistics that go some way to disentangling the relationship between the use of various media platforms and political engagement as determined by three standardised measures (selected based on their ability to predict agency). The analysis illustrates how usage trends do seem to predict levels of political efficacy and governmental trust, though not self-efficacy. These usage trends relate to particular media formats (legacy vs. social media) and discursive actions. Discussion of current events, regardless of which platform the discussion took place on, was shown to affect both political efficacy and governmental trust. Notably amongst social media users, access to these types of political discussions represented one of their primary reasons for engaging with the platform, as shown in *Chapter 6*. However, there was less of an impact on political efficacy, which may be a result of a perceived power imbalance between legacy media and grass-roots content producers online (Fuchs, 2014).

Ultimately, the results of *Chapter 7* emphasise the importance of discussing current events with friends and acquaintances in predicting political efficacy, regardless of media platform. This is seen despite access to potentially divergent discourses online and is seen to be reinforced by relevant literature that emphasises the importance of social institutions (such as schools or church groups), familial relations and friends (Althusser, 2014; Amnå, Ekström, Kerr & Stattin, 2009; Marcuse, 1964). This finding is particularly important considering how maintaining familial contact is frequently cited as one of the primary reasons for using social media amongst those interviewed, and may provide

some justification for the lack of a significant correlation between social media use and political efficacy, given the attribution of value to these conversations rather than the social media platform directly.

The accounts of the four participants in *Chapter 6* are used to provide a narrative that can be used to evaluate the impact of media use on political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, drawing on their experiences of being a member of the British electorate and a media user. This experiential exploration builds upon the findings of the second research question, whereby those who more frequently engage with social media - employing various techniques deemed by Prensky (2001) to be indicative of a “digital native” (such as fact checking and engaging with debate) - identify more strongly with the platform and often show greater likelihood to engage with politics and a greater sense of political efficacy overall. Given that *Chapter 6* concerns itself with the experiences of four individuals, it is hard to ascertain whether there is indeed a measurable association between media use and factors predicting political engagement in the wider population, hence the combination with *Chapter 7*. That being said, the difficulty expressed by those wishing to engage with politics (notably Louise and Teresa) highlights the importance of culturally salient values held by those interviewed regarding interest in and engagement with politics. Louise puts this neatly when she suggests that expressing an interest in politics makes you seem dry and boring. This perceived barrier to entry is an important facet of the testimonies, as it fosters a discussion based around individual agency. Again, drawing from the testimonies there is a widely held belief that those in power have made little effort to engage with young people politically, instead prioritising older voters; a notion that is supported by the wider literature (Mycock & Tonge, 2012). However, those participants interviewed in *Chapter 6* acknowledged that this barrier is notably reduced online and there is potential for various constitutional and non-constitutional forms of political engagement present on social media. This reduced barrier to entry could be argued to facilitate a greater sense of agency in those interviewed. That being said, the barrier is not the sole reason cited for limited engagement, there is still a sense that many consider themselves imposters in the political realm (Chris and to some degree Louise) such may prevent engagement offline outside of small local issues.

In comparison to social media, legacy formats- whilst reporting a decreased readership (as shown by the Hansard Society, 2012)- can still be seen to exert a considerable degree of influence both on and offline. The testimonies make regular reference to the presence of news organisations online and compare their trustworthiness to other content creators. Fuchs (2014) among others

(Fuchs & Pfetsch, 1996; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006) suggests that legacy media influence comes from their greater social capital resulting from their perceived expertise. What this means, is that it becomes hard to disentangle the impact of legacy media on political efficacy, self-efficacy, and self-esteem in isolation from social media. Overall, the results of these two chapters systematically address RQ3. *Chapter 7* demonstrates quantitatively the links between media use and the three standardised measures, highlighting the importance of discursive actions both on and offline in facilitating agency. These associations are then contextualised within the lived experience of the four interviewed participants of *Chapter 6*, which not only lends ecological validity to the findings, but allows for a more meaningful interpretation of those correlations.

## **8.2: Evaluating the methods: strengths and limitations**

*Sections 8.2* and *8.3* evaluate the methods undertaken as part of this thesis and the potential for future development, before concluding with an assessment of the overall question posed by the thesis. The application of mixed methodologies in this study represents an extension of the work of Schrøder (2012); in doing so, it provides an attempt to facilitate an integrative approach that “synthesizes the [quantitative and qualitative] approaches into one empirical design” (p.798). Attempts were made during the thesis design process to ensure the greatest chance of success, with the limitations of individual techniques being largely addressed by the strengths of the supplementary methods. With this in mind, *Section 8.2* seeks to assess the validity of the findings overall as well as the potential limitations of the thesis, before extending to discuss the potential for future research.

The first point that is assessed with regards to overall limitations concerns *Chapter’s 4* and *5*. *Chapter 4* highlighted the imbalance in representation of non-constitutional and constitutional stories across the articles sampled. As alluded in *Chapter 4* itself, while this limits the generalisability of the findings, it does accurately reflect the nature of the coverage within the context studied. Future work in this regard should seek to broaden the scope of the analysis to include a greater number of stories associated with non-constitutional political engagement, in order to ensure the generalisability and comparability of the findings across cases. However, this in itself raises questions regarding the similarity of non-constitutional acts; are all “Occupy” movements the same? Do environmental lobbies like the Anti-Fracking campaign look similar to other lobbies against green belt encroachment (for example)? Overall, these questions suggest that another possible avenue for future research could be to explore what defines a non-constitutional act and whether there are broad types or categories, as with traditional political behaviours.



The second limitation of the initial content analysis pertains to the application of computer-mediated methods in *Chapter 5*. In terms of the analysis conducted, there are some limitations with the techniques outlined by Lewis, Zamith and Hermida (2013), primarily given the emphasis on computer mediation and secondary qualitative analysis of predominantly quantitative outputs (in the form of co-occurrence networks and hierarchical clusters). While these did inform a limited qualitative exploration of the original source material- due to the large number of tweets sampled- the detail typically associated with these qualitative techniques had to be inferred through the secondary analysis. *Chapter 5* assumed that the tweets sampled originated solely from the UK. Whilst not ideal, this was necessary and was accounted for by emphasising users and Hashtags originating in the UK in the search parameters. However, the inclusion of keywords via Boolean operators may broaden this to include external coverage, particularly on issues relating to the EU. Ultimately, this is a much less significant concern as it retains greater ecological validity, but does force the need to reflect upon the context in which the data was obtained. Future research could seek to widen the net- so to speak- in order to draw from a larger body of sources and potentially the personal accounts of politicians and their parties (in addition to those accounts associated with large media organisations and news aggregators). This would allow for an assessment of their role of content creation and the impact they may have on the discussion. Furthermore, the findings of *Chapter 5* focused only two instances of national coverage- one constitutional and one non-constitutional- and as such, these findings are only truly representative of those given events. Any attempts to generalise beyond this context should be done carefully and with an awareness of relevant abstraction. Once again, future research should bring more instances of each case in order to foster a broader assessment of the contribution of each news disseminator; be it legacy media or social media, to the construction of these events.

As with *Chapters 4* and *5*, the limitations associated with *Chapter 6* are tied to sample selection. While the sample is not inherently a problem with the method itself, it does not foster a good comparison across gender, due to the unequal distribution of higher education across the sample. Similarly, all participants were derived from long-term Conservative constituencies, which in itself fosters comparison across participants, but does limit exposure to potentially different conceptions of politics from individuals that could have been sampled from either Labour or Liberal Democrat constituencies. Building upon this methodology, a stratified sample may be employed in order to identify potentially different themes, due to the demographic differences inherent with a more diverse selection of participants. This would be particularly important given the noted

differences in media uptake and usage based upon demographic information, as alluded to by the Hansard Society (2012) and Courtois, Merchant, De Marez and Verleye (2009).

As with *Chapter 6*, the primary issue associated with *Chapter 7* relates to the issue of sampling. However, rather than resulting from a discrepancy based on level of education (which was not assessed, though was implied due to the focus on undergraduates) it relates to a skewed sample in favour of female participants. The use of undergraduates reiterates potential shortfalls in comparison similar to *Chapter 6*, though considering that education level was not factored in relation to any of the standardised measures, this is ultimately a secondary concern.

The final limitation of *Chapter 7* is specifically directed at the measures, in particular, the application of Caprara, Vecchione, Capanna & Mebane's (2009) measure of political efficacy. The primary issue with this measure is alluded to in the original chapter but relates to the idea that this measure of political efficacy is strongly tied to traditional constitutional methods of engagement, such as party membership and voting (Baek, 2010; Forno & Ceccarini, 2006; Strømsnes, 2009). As such, future research seeking to explore political efficacy should ensure the inclusion of standardised measures that account for non-constitutional acts of engagement, such as political consumerism in order to get a more accurate understanding of political agency.

In relation to the thesis overall, the most logical improvement would be to ensure greater integration of all methodologies employed, in particular those used as part of *Chapters 4* and *5*. The integration apparent in the subsequent chapters (*Chapters 6* and *7*) was done in a manner to ensure that all assertions are based upon empirical *a priori* predictions, rather than informing the analysis conducted directly. In order to ensure the "*synthesis*" of these multiple approaches as outlined by Schrøder (2012), future work must employ these findings to a greater degree. This is due to the notable contribution of these chapters towards understanding the methods of dissemination and story construction integral to quantifying the impact of these platforms on political and civic engagement. As noted in the section so far, there are a number of components that must be addressed in relation to future research conducted in this area, if this methodology is to be employed again.

### **8.3: Reflecting on the process: Potential for future work and concluding remarks**

The following section seeks to identify the contribution of this thesis toward potential work in the future, its suitability for continuation towards post-doctoral research and the potential contribution that the work may make to the field overall. The interdisciplinary, mixed-methods approach ensured that the young people who took part were able to have their voice heard, and that these findings went further than many of the mono-methodological approaches currently used within the field. The most logical progression from this thesis would be to utilise the strength and originality of the mixed methodologies applied, and begin to generate a predictive model that addresses the perceived and potential impact of each media platform on political engagement (again putting young people at the centre of such an endeavour). This model would likely be based upon the social cognitive theory of mass communication as outlined by Bandura (2001) and would be adapted to include the empirical findings of this thesis, which highlight links between media use, governmental trust and political efficacy. It is worth mentioning the exclusion of structural equation modelling in *Chapter 7*, as it is through this approach that the model outlined above would be created. By supplementing the data collected in this thesis with post-doctoral study it would be possible to expand the theoretical and empirical base established in the current work and ensure the greatest predictive validity of the proposed model of media influence.

The original question posed by this thesis related to an evaluation of the role of media in fostering political engagement among young people in the UK. The findings outlined above have noted a number of distinct differences in the perceived role of various media platforms (as shown by the testimonies of *Chapter 6*) and their potential impact on empowerment and agency (*Chapter 7*). The strength of social media such as Twitter, lies in their reflexivity and instantaneous coverage of events in situations where legacy media coverage is limited or restricted (Groshek & Tandoc, 2017; Howard, 2011; Papacharissi, 2010). Furthermore, the ability of social media to mobilise youth populations both politically (as seen in the Occupy movement along with other single-issue movements, Copeland, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle, Hooghe & Micheletti, 2005) as well as along civic lines (as seen in the 2011 London Riot clean-up campaign, Fuchs, 2011), makes it unique as a platform. The diversity of voices can be seen to counter the impact of concentrated news organisations with Hsu et al. (2013) suggesting that while these organisations may still represent primary agenda-setters, they are infrequently reTweeted within the network, limiting their impact. With this in mind, the work of Hsu et al. (2013) and the findings of *Chapter 5* contradict the work of Fuchs (2014), suggesting that social

media may be more horizontal than Fuchs initially conceived and more in line with the democratic participation model of the press, outlined by McQuail (2002).

On the other hand, when compared to social media, the role of the legacy media is less easily defined. Legacy media's position as primary agenda-setters (Fuchs & Pfetsch, 1996; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006) is quantified by Latané (1996) given their "pseudo-geographical" proximity to their audience, by way of their national distribution networks and their perceived role as experts in their field. However, the role of legacy media as gatekeepers is brought into question, due to their reliance on negative coverage over informed coverage of policy (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). The findings of *Chapter 4* suggest that despite this perceived role, there is little to no representation of British youth within the coverage of the cases used in this thesis. Furthermore, the coverage is largely focused on conflict-orientated messages, most notably in stories related to constitutional and non-constitutional events (Baumeister et al., 2001). The coverage of the non-constitutional events used in this thesis are frequently decontextualized to the point where only a singular narrative exists (in the case of Occupy: Parliament Square this was a narrative based around criminality). This is shown through various framing techniques, as identified by both Leets (2000) and Herman and Chomsky (1988) in their propaganda model. This adherence to conflict-orientated messages leads the coverage to appear less diverse than the coverage online, with multiple links and intersections across stories (shown in *Figures 5.1* and *5.4*), limiting both clarity and muddying the impact of the outcome overall.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that social media such as Twitter, hold the potential to facilitate political engagement within young people, beyond what is currently achieved by the British legacy media. This assertion is based upon a series of theoretically grounded ideas about the perceived roles of each platform, their overall uptake and the styles of coverage inherent within each. These theoretical assumptions are supported by the empirical findings contained within this thesis. They suggest that should social media continue to progress in a socially responsible way, rather than succumb to the legacy of television in terms of emancipation (Groombridge, 1972), it will stand as a bulwark against ideological imposition by the state (Benkler, 2006; Redden, 2001). This would ultimately foster an empowered politically mobile youth culture focused around individual points of political action rather than traditional conceptions of what could be considered political (Copeland, 2014; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2013; Stolle et al., 2005). This thesis highlights the fundamental paradigmatic shift of youth conceptions of politics from the "big building" as Louise states in *Chapter 6*, to online political engagement mediated by social media; where results can be seen and momentum gained,

challenging the assumption of an apathetic youth and establishing an understanding of a group that are political agents operating on their own terms.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Pilot Study of the European General Election 2014

The following pilot study intended to assess the suitability of Lewis, Zamith and Hermida's (2013) method for dealing with the data obtained from Twitter. The method utilises tools similar to those employed by Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliveira (2012) in their work on the Arab Spring. Sample data for the pilot concerned the coverage of the 2014 European Parliamentary Elections both online, via Twitter and by the British legacy media. The 2014 European Parliamentary Elections represented a unique opportunity for the pilot, considering the events impact on several of the final cases. Furthermore, the coverage of the elections constituted a significant proportion of the British legacy media's output during May 2014, ensuring that the pilot would serve as an appropriate stress test of the tools used during the analysis. The findings of the pilot are used to reflect upon the appropriateness of the method in obtaining salient data from the outlined case-studies, rather than to address the research questions outlined in *Section 3.1*.

#### *Method*

##### *Data acquisition and file preparation*

The present analysis examined the news values, form and content present within the coverage of Twitter and the British legacy media during the period of 8<sup>th</sup> May 2014 to 29<sup>th</sup> May 2014, encompassing the two week run up to Election Day and the proceeding week after the British European Parliamentary Elections.

##### *Twitter sample*

The Twitter sample focused primarily on a series of Hashtags and users associated with the elections (#EP2015, @Europarl\_EN, @EPElections) in concert with a series of search terms tied to the event. These tags were most prominent during the event, but also feature in tweets cross-posted to other frequently used tags tied to the elections. Archives of Tweets between the target dates were generated using an online GoogleDoc designed to capture and archive Tweets in a manner more extensive than the Twitter API (Hawkseye, 2012). The Tweets archived in this manner contained the content of each Tweet, Hashtag, keyword, date and time stamp as well a variety of backend API information based on user set preferences. Usernames were also included, but have been removed from the file in order to maintain anonymity. A series of filters were applied to the raw data in order

to reduce the sample size excluding duplicate posts, in order to reduce issues of noise and inconsistencies in the archiving process. Over that period, a total of approximately 16,300 Tweets were collected.

#### *British legacy media sample*

The sample of news articles obtained from the British legacy media were obtained using LexisNexis. 65 sample articles were selected from British National Broadsheet newspapers including *The Guardian* (18), *The Independent* (14), *The Times* (19) and *The Daily Telegraph* (14). Each article was sampled from within the time period previously identified and excluded short pieces with a word count below 200 in addition to the exclusion of letters to the editor. The reason for focusing solely on Broadsheet coverage is due to the continued belief within the academic forum that Broadsheet papers are the primary agenda setters (Fuchs & Pfetsch, 1996; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006) and are responsible for covering topics considered to be integral to formulating public priorities (Cohen, 1963; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

#### *Sampling and analysis strategies*

A frequency analysis was conducted on both the 16,300 archived Tweets and the 65 articles obtained from LexisNexis using KH Coder; an open source software program (Higuchi, 2015). On completion of basic descriptive statistical analysis, computerized content analysis techniques were applied, utilizing the same open source software to both the Tweets and articles obtained. The primary analysis of both samples centred on the generation of co-occurrence matrices in addition to Hierarchical Clusters, in a manner akin to those employed by Osgood (1959) and Danowski (1993). The combination of these matrices and qualitative clusters allow for the assessment of co-occurring words, based on the top 100 weighted words according to a Jaccard Coefficient (Romesburg, 1984), as well as the identification of key discussions within the sampled texts. The layout for each of these nodes is governed by the work of Fruchterman and Reingold (1991), allowing for a direct comparison between the various nodes in the network. Utilizing these co-occurrence networks in combination with word frequency analysis and hierarchical cluster analyses, a series of assumptions can be drawn regarding the overall content of each of the articles, as well as the archived Tweets. The co-occurrence networks in particular aid in the identification of the most influential nodes (or most influential words) within the coverage, allowing for the inference of the author's intentional acts regarding word choice and message construction. Further content analysis was applied to both sources on a reduced sample of

Tweets, in order to generate greater detail required for manual analysis. Throughout this process, both files were extensively read in order to acclimatise the differences in parlance and style between the two platforms. These differences were taken into account when addressing the most dominant themes and tone present in each source. The application of both quantitative computerized methods and qualitative approaches sought to expand validity and reliability (Lewis, Zamith & Hermida, 2013).

## *Results*

### *Word frequency analysis*

The following tables outline the 20 most significant terms present within the coverage of the British legacy media (*Table a.1*). This encompasses all 65 unique articles obtained from four sampled Broadsheets (*The Times, The Independent, The Guardian, and The Daily Telegraph*) and from the approximately 16,300 Tweets sourced from Twitter (*Table a.2*). All data was obtained between the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2014 and the 29<sup>th</sup> May 2014 and includes both pre-election and post-election coverage. The collection of terms has been adapted to remove connectives and highlights significant nouns (denoting topics) and verbs (denoting actions) relevant to the coverage overall.

### *British legacy media*

The most notable words derived from the coverage of the British legacy media centre around British national politics, rather than international stories relating to the continent. This is apparent from the emphasis placed on terms such as “Party” (497), “UKIP” (321) and citations of significant British figures like “Nick Clegg” (183), “Nigel Farage” (141) and “David Cameron” (83). Furthermore, these terms are also associated with the electoral victories and defeats of the various parties as well as concerns regarding the leadership of the Liberal Democrat party (which is within the top ten most frequently cited words). It would also appear that from a wider reading of the cases sampled, that much of the discussion regarding Europe is in relation to UKIP’s right wing politics. However, this is mostly secondary to the internal party concerns of the Liberal Democrats and the challenge to Nick Clegg’s leadership posed by Vince Cable. The findings illustrated by the British legacy media word frequencies demonstrate a limited focus on European policy. Instead they place greater emphasis on party conflicts; an aspect of media coverage that has been shown by Levy and Rickard (1982) to limit political efficacy.

*Table a.1: Frequency statistics of the 20 most significant terms (European Parliamentary Election 2014: Broadsheet Coverage)*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>
1	Party	497	11	Labour	118
2	UKIP	321	12	Win	104
3	Election	300	13	Result	102
4	Nick Clegg	183	14	EU	98
5	Leader	158	15	Britain	96
6	European	150	16	Europe	87
7	Liberal Democrats	142	17	David Cameron	83
8	Nigel Farage	141	18	Lose	77
9	Vote	135	19	Leadership	69
10	Poll	122	20	Vince Cable	68

#### *Twitter*

The frequencies obtained from the Twitter sample focus more specifically on the details of the election and are facilitated by the Hashtag “@Europarl\_EN” (392). The “@Europarl\_EN” hashtag focuses on providing salient political information for those voting. This can be seen by the frequency of politically relevant behaviours highlighted in the collated terms, “Vote” (3214), “Register” (1115), “Poll” (1256) and “May” (2194). As with the coverage of the British legacy media, there is some focus placed on the success of “UKIP” (2310) and “Nigel Farage” (1102), as can be seen by the discussion of his far-right leanings in the coverage as a whole. As predicted, the presence of “@Europarl\_EN” within the most frequently cited terms suggests that much of the digital coverage is driven by these “personalities” or Hashtags (McQuail, 2002). In this instance, this Hashtag provides salient political information in an attempt to foster greater engagement with the European Elections (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochschild, 2010); the nature of this coverage is highlighted more clearly in the subsequent analyses. It can also be seen that the top 20 terms present in the Twitter sources mirror those of the British legacy media by-and-large. This trend is similarly demonstrated by Papacharissi and de Fatima Oliviera (2012) and are employed in line with Howard’s (2011) postulations regarding similarities between agenda-setting media and social media, though is also unique in its more focused approach to electoral information.

*Table a.2: Frequency statistics of the 20 most significant terms (European Parliamentary Election 2014: Twitter Coverage)*

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Terms</b>	<b>Count</b>
1	European	12822	11	Register	1115
2	Election	12810	12	Nigel Farage	1102
3	Vote	3214	13	Change	413
4	UKIP	2310	14	Far-Right	425
5	May	2194	15	@Europarl_EN	392
6	Parliament	1754	16	People	373
7	Poll	1485	17	Continent	362
8	Local	1256	18	Labour	342
9	Party	1214	19	Europe	313
10	EU	1148	20	Deadline	312

#### *Hierarchical cluster analysis*

A hierarchical cluster analysis was run on the previously identified samples separately, in order to assess differences in coverage and the weighting attributed to particular facets of the British electoral campaign. The findings of each analysis are provided below in detail before an assessment of the methods employed.

#### *British legacy media*

The analysis - conducted using Ward's method - produced four clusters, with variables significantly different between each. The first cluster is predominantly concerned with the success of Nigel Farage in the European Parliamentary elections and the success of UKIP in the national polls. The emphasis of this cluster is primarily on the result, rather than the policies UKIP represents. There are also instances within the sample that reference Danish Xenophobes and Nigel Farage's popularity with their movements, which contextualises the far-right policies of the party. The second and third clusters focus on the Conservative and Labour parties respectively. The Conservative clusters contextualise the UKIP win in terms of local politics and the loss of significant ground on behalf of the Conservative party. The Labour cluster groups begin to draw parallels between the UKIP win and the inability of Labour to provide a bulwark against far-right policies; those epitomised by UKIP. The final cluster is the least easy to define as it takes a broad perspective on the election overall, addressing national

concerns in relation to continental Europe, emphasising the impact of policy and lack of engagement within the British population. Present to a lesser degree in this cluster is the internal party conflict within the Liberal Democrat party between Nick Clegg and Vince Cable. As it can be seen, the emphasis within the British legacy media is on national concerns rather than on Europe, with much of the electoral campaign and policy contextualised within the ongoing rivalries that make up the British political system. Furthermore, the coverage does not provide much insight into what the result of Nigel Farage's election may mean, particularly due to the result being overshadowed by a potential coup within the Liberal Democrats.

### *Twitter*

The analysis - conducted using Ward's method - produced five clusters, with variables significantly different between each. The nature of these clusters is much more fractured than in the broadsheet coverage; this may be a result of a more diverse story base. The first cluster revolves around the user "@Europarl\_EN" and the role it plays in the electoral predictions and coverage. It represents a facilitatory voice designed to foster engagement in the run up to the elections on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2014. This is similar to the second cluster, which focuses on the details surrounding the elections, emphasising the importance of the vote, the need to register and the polling dates. The second cluster also encompasses the most significant number of reTweets, emphasising the secondary role of "@Europarl\_EN" as a content disseminator. The third cluster mirrors the coverage of the British legacy media most strongly, focusing on the internal national struggles between the constituent parties. It is here that polling data is used to illustrate UKIP's victory and suggests that popular opinion was in favour of their far-right politics, due to a lack of political knowledge or a lack of a suitable candidate from the other parties. The fourth and fifth clusters focus more heavily on Europe and the role of news aggregators online. Within these clusters, there are concerns levelled at Spain regarding its economic state, as well as coverage of far right marches in France, drawing parallels to the success of Farage in the elections. So while these clusters are more diverse and less easily defined, the coverage obtained from Twitter sources can be seen to focus on both the international and national impact of the European elections. In doing so, Twitter can be seen to draw parallels between British national politics and that of mainland Europe, when the British legacy media does not. Furthermore as with the word frequencies, the importance of news aggregators, Hashtags and personalities online can be seen. This is particularly apparent with regards to the dissemination of politically salient information designed to foster greater political efficacy and engagement (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hochschild, 2010).



### *Co-occurrence networks*

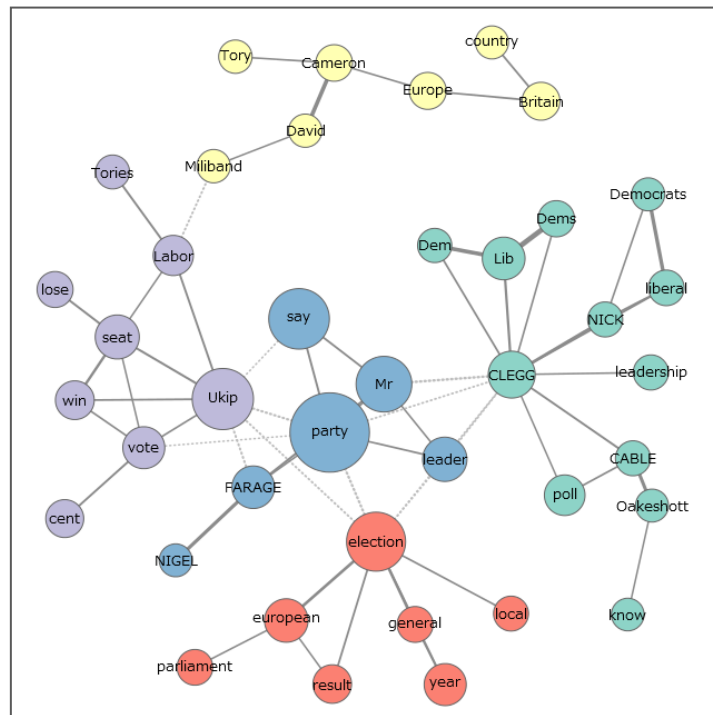
The following figures detail the construction of a Co-Occurrence Network for each of the coverage types; the British legacy media (*Figure a.1*) and that obtained from Twitter (*Figure a.2*). This construction highlights keywords and their relations to one another and is a more visual representation of the findings of the Hierarchical Cluster Analysis. Colour indicates dominant themes and the geographical proximity of terms indicates further similarity. Associated terms which are not considered similar are indicated with a dotted line.

#### *British legacy media*

The figure below (*Figure a.1*) illustrates the most connected words within the coverage of the British legacy media. Within this network, five main concepts or themes can be identified, much in the same way as the hierarchical cluster analysis. Many of these themes parallel those identified in the previous analysis, though the visual representation allows for a more nuanced exploration. The yellow cluster contextualises British politics within Europe, focusing heavily on the Conservative and Labour parties. However, their distance from the red cluster suggests that, while they are linked to Europe, they are not frequently addressed in relation to the European elections, as suggested in the hierarchical analysis. On the other hand, tangible links can be seen between the original yellow cluster and the purple cluster, which largely concerns the loss of seats to UKIP and lack of success had by Labour. Within this purple cluster, UKIP is the most dominant node which, like Labour, bleeds into other nodes; primarily the central dark blue cluster. This cluster, due to its position at the centre of the network, highlights its importance within the coverage. Unsurprisingly, this dark blue cluster focuses on Nigel Farage and his overall success at the elections. The term “party” represents the most significant node here, suggesting that much of the success at the election is contextualised as a UKIP victory, though his leadership is addressed directly. The final cluster is the light blue; the parallels between “Clegg” and “leader” highlights that this cluster links directly to the power struggle occurring within the Liberal Democrats. This dynamic may be attributed to their lack of success at the elections. Many of the nodes here are comparable in size, suggesting similar weighting. In addition, particular affiliations can be seen based on proximity, most notably Cable and Oakeshott: the reported ringleaders behind the potential coup. The span of this node highlights the proportion of the coverage it encompasses, so while it is not the central story, it is one that occupies a significant portion of the British legacy media’s coverage of the elections. It is important to note that there is very little coverage

of Europe here, emphasising the previous findings of the word frequencies and hierarchical cluster analysis.

Figure a.1: Co-Occurrence network detailing highly associated terms in the British legacy media (European Parliamentary Election 2014)

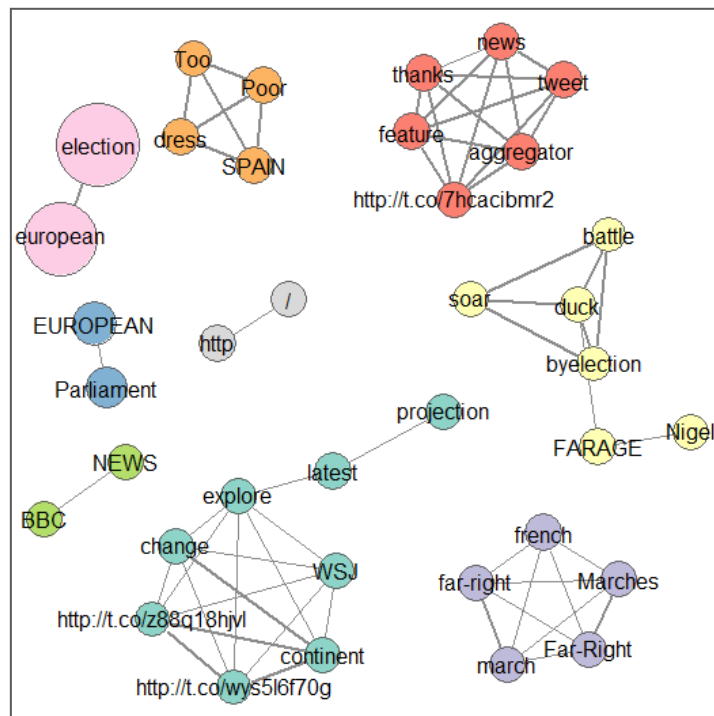


### Twitter

The co-occurrence network seen in *Figure a.2* is less clear than that of *Figure a.1*. The lack of dotted connectors suggests that the content is much more compartmentalised, which is in line with the findings of the other methods. The red cluster focuses on news aggregators and is not particularly useful for understanding the nature of the coverage found on Twitter. The same can be said for the grey, pink, green and dark blue clusters. With these removed, there are four main clusters of interest; the yellow concerning Nigel Farage, UKIP and the by-election; the purple cluster focuses on the French opposition marches and the rise of the far-right, their proximity again indicating parallels with UKIP. The light blue cluster represents “@Europarl\_EN” as it focuses on electoral projections and reference to Europe. The final cluster of interest is the orange which focuses on Spain. However, this is pushed to the edge of the network, suggesting it is tangential at best. None of the nodes or clusters occupy a central position, providing evidence for the claim that the Twitter coverage is diverse and made up of

a number of voices and foci. That being said, the nodes for European Election highlight the importance of these words within the coverage. This is unsurprising given the topic, though they are more prominent than in the broadsheet coverage. Overall, considering the presence of aggregators and links to additional content, Twitter can be seen to facilitate a wider discussion focused on Europe as a whole, though British national concerns still represent a significant portion of the coverage.

Figure a.2: Co-Occurrence network detailing highly associated terms in the Twitter coverage (European Parliamentary Election 2014)



## Appendix 2.1: Scottish Referendum 2014 Coding Sheet

**ARTICLE ID:**

**DATE:**

**NEWS ORGANISATION:**

i: The Daily Telegraph

ii: The Independent

iii: The Times

iv: The Guardian

**WORD COUNT:**

**PRIMARY THEME:**

i: Economy

ii: Separation

iii: Unity

iv: Providing Key Information (Facilitating the Vote)

v: Other

**SECONDARY THEME:**

i: Economy

ii: Separation

iii: Unity

iv: Providing Key Information (Facilitating the Vote)

v: Other

**NO. OF UNIQUE SOURCES:**

**PRIMARY SOURCE TYPE:**

i: Governmental Organisations

ii: Political Parties

iii: International Organisations

iv: Persons / Citizens

v: Community Groups

vi: Business Groups

vii: Pressure Groups

viii: Trade Unions

ix: Religious Groups

x: Other / Not Identified

**SECONDARY SOURCE TYPE:**

i: Governmental Organisations

ii: Political Parties

iii: International Organisations

iv: Persons / Citizens

v: Community Groups

vi: Business Groups

vii: Pressure Groups

viii: Trade Unions

ix: Religious Groups

x: Other / Not Identified


**PRIMARY POWER FOCUS:**

- i: Specific Politician [Detail Below]
- ii: Specific Demographic [Detail Below]
- iii: Business Organisation [Detail Below]
- iv: International [Detail Below]
- v: NGO [Detail Below]
- vi: Government
- vii: National Population
- viii: Community

**SPECIFIED POWER FOCUS:**

**NUMBER OF CITATIONS OF PRIMARY POWER FOCUS**

**SECONDARY POWER FOCUS:**

- i: Specific Politician [Detail Below]
- ii: Specific Demographic [Detail Below]
- iii: Business Organisation [Detail Below]
- iv: International [Detail Below]
- v: NGO [Detail Below]
- vi: Government
- vii: National Population
- viii: Community

**SPECIFIED POWER FOCUS:**

**NUMBER OF CITATION OF SECONDARY POWER FOCUS**

**STATE OF POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY FOCI:**

- i: Collaborative
- ii: Fractured
- iii: Opposed
- iv: Not Addressed

**REPRESENTATION OF TARGET POPULATION:**

- i: Inference (Statements *infer* something associated with public opinion: No citation or systematic evidence provided)
- ii: Impersonation (Statements take on the voice of the reader: Assumed Target Population)
- iii: Vox Pop / Direct Quotation
- iv: Opinion Poll / Survey
- v: Protest / Demonstration
- vi: Not Acknowledged

**TONE IN WHICH THE TARGET POPULATION IS ADDRESSED:**

- i: Positive
- ii: Negative
- iii: Ambivalent
- iv: Not Addressed

**FREQUENCY OF TERMS**

- i: Business
- ii: Policy
- iii: Unity/Union/Unified


- iv: Independent
- v: Uncertainty
- vi: Crisis
- vii: Economy
- viii: Inconsistency
- ix: Taxes/Taxation/Tax
- x: England
- xi: Scotland
- xii: UK/United Kingdom


**Appendix 2.2: The British General Election 2015 Coding Sheet**

**ARTICLE ID:**

**DATE:**

**NEWS ORGANISATION:**

i: The Daily Telegraph

ii: The Independent

iii: The Times

iv: The Guardian

**WORD COUNT:**

**PRIMARY THEME:**

i: Election Uncertainty

ii: Politician Popularity

iii: Scottish Independence

iv: Economy

v: Other

**SECONDARY THEME:**

i: Election Uncertainty

ii: Politician Popularity

iii: Scottish Independence

iv: Economy

v: Other

**NO. OF UNIQUE SOURCES:**

**PRIMARY SOURCE TYPE:**

i: Governmental Organisations

ii: Political Parties

iii: International Organisations

iv: Persons / Citizens

v: Community Groups

vi: Business Groups

vii: Pressure Groups

viii: Trade Unions

ix: Religious Groups

x: Other / Not Identified

**SECONDARY SOURCE TYPE:**

i: Governmental Organisations

ii: Political Parties

iii: International Organisations

iv: Persons / Citizens

v: Community Groups

vi: Business Groups

vii: Pressure Groups

viii: Trade Unions

ix: Religious Groups

x: Other / Not Identified


**PRIMARY POWER FOCUS:**

- i: Specific Politician [Detail Below]
- ii: Specific Demographic [Detail Below]
- iii: Business Organisation [Detail Below]
- iv: International [Detail Below]
- v: NGO [Detail Below]
- vi: Government
- vii: National Population
- viii: Community

**SPECIFIED POWER FOCUS:**

**NUMBER OF CITATIONS OF PRIMARY POWER FOCUS**

**SECONDARY POWER FOCUS:**

- i: Specific Politician [Detail Below]
- ii: Specific Demographic [Detail Below]
- iii: Business Organisation [Detail Below]
- iv: International [Detail Below]
- v: NGO [Detail Below]
- vi: Government
- vii: National Population
- viii: Community

**SPECIFIED POWER FOCUS:**

**NUMBER OF CITATION OF SECONDARY POWER FOCUS**

**STATE OF POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY FOCI:**

- i: Collaborative
- ii: Fractured
- iii: Opposed
- iv: Not Addressed

**REPRESENTATION OF TARGET POPULATION:**

- i: Inference (Statements *infer* something associated with public opinion: No citation or systematic evidence provided)
- ii: Impersonation (Statements take on the voice of the reader: Assumed Target Population)
- iii: Vox Pop / Direct Quotation
- iv: Opinion Poll / Survey
- v: Protest / Demonstration
- vi: Not Acknowledged

**TONE IN WHICH THE TARGET POPULATION IS ADDRESSED:**

- i: Positive
- ii: Negative
- iii: Ambivalent
- iv: Not Addressed

**FREQUENCY OF TERMS**

- i: Uncertainty
- ii: UKIP
- iii: Economy




- iv: Scotland
- v: Poverty
- vi: Voters/ Electorate
- vii: Youth
- viii: Employment/ Jobs
- ix: Tax/ Taxes
- x: Opposition
- xi: European Union
- xii: Trust


**Appendix 2.3: Occupy: Parliament Square 2014 Coding Sheet**

**ARTICLE ID:**

**DATE:**

**NEWS ORGANISATION:**

i: The Daily Telegraph

ii: The Independent

iii: The Times

iv: The Guardian

v: The Observer

**WORD COUNT:**

**PRIMARY THEME:**

i: Police Control

ii: Political Representation

iii: Peaceful Protest

iv: Illegal Occupation

v: Other

**SECONDARY THEME:**

i: Police Control

ii: Political Representation

iii: Peaceful Protest

iv: Illegal Occupation

v: Other

**NO. OF UNIQUE SOURCES:**

**PRIMARY SOURCE TYPE:**

i: Governmental Organisations

ii: Political Parties

iii: International Organisations

iv: Persons / Citizens

v: Community Groups

vi: Business Groups

vii: Pressure Groups

viii: Trade Unions

ix: Religious Groups

x: Other / Not Identified

**SECONDARY SOURCE TYPE:**

i: Governmental Organisations

ii: Political Parties

iii: International Organisations

iv: Persons / Citizens

v: Community Groups

vi: Business Groups

vii: Pressure Groups

viii: Trade Unions

ix: Religious Groups

x: Other / Not Identified


**PRIMARY POWER FOCUS:**

- i: Specific Politician [Detail Below]
- ii: Specific Demographic [Detail Below]
- iii: Business Organisation [Detail Below]
- iv: International [Detail Below]
- v: NGO [Detail Below]
- vi: Government
- vii: National Population
- viii: Community

**SPECIFIED POWER FOCUS:**

**NUMBER OF CITATIONS OF PRIMARY POWER FOCUS**

**SECONDARY POWER FOCUS:**

- i: Specific Politician [Detail Below]
- ii: Specific Demographic [Detail Below]
- iii: Business Organisation [Detail Below]
- iv: International [Detail Below]
- v: NGO [Detail Below]
- vi: Government
- vii: National Population
- viii: Community

**SPECIFIED POWER FOCUS:**

**NUMBER OF CITATION OF SECONDARY POWER FOCUS**

**STATE OF POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY FOCI:**

- i: Collaborative
- ii: Fractured
- iii: Opposed
- iv: Not Addressed

**REPRESENTATION OF TARGET POPULATION:**

- i: Inference (Statements *infer* something associated with public opinion: No citation or systematic evidence provided)
- ii: Impersonation (Statements take on the voice of the reader: Assumed Target Population)
- iii: Vox Pop / Direct Quotation
- iv: Opinion Poll / Survey
- v: Protest / Demonstration
- vi: Not Acknowledged

**TONE IN WHICH THE TARGET POPULATION IS ADDRESSED:**

- i: Positive
- ii: Negative
- iii: Ambivalent
- iv: Not Addressed

**FREQUENCY OF TERMS**

- i: Protest
- ii: Democracy
- iii: Activist/Activists


- iv: Illegal
- v: Criminal
- vi: Ignored
- vii: Repression
- viii: Policy
- ix: Violence
- x: Non-Violence
- xi: Politics/Political Process
- xii: Representation


**Appendix 2.4: The Anti-Fracking campaign 2014/15 Coding Sheet**

**ARTICLE ID:**

**DATE:**

**NEWS ORGANISATION:**

i: The Daily Telegraph

ii: The Independent

iii: The Times

iv: The Guardian

**WORD COUNT:**

**PRIMARY THEME:**

i: Fracking Ban

ii: Investment Uncertainty/Economy

iii: Political Maneuvering

iv: Public Consultation

v: Other

**SECONDARY THEME:**

i: Fracking Ban

ii: Investment Uncertainty/Economy

iii: Political Maneuvering

iv: Public Consultation

v: Other

**NO. OF UNIQUE SOURCES:**

**PRIMARY SOURCE TYPE:**

i: Governmental Organisations

ii: Political Parties

iii: International Organisations

iv: Persons / Citizens

v: Community Groups

vi: Business Groups

vii: Pressure Groups

viii: Trade Unions

ix: Religious Groups

x: Other / Not Identified

**SECONDARY SOURCE TYPE:**

i: Governmental Organisations

ii: Political Parties

iii: International Organisations

iv: Persons / Citizens

v: Community Groups

vi: Business Groups

vii: Pressure Groups

viii: Trade Unions

ix: Religious Groups

x: Other / Not Identified






**PRIMARY POWER FOCUS:**

- i: Specific Politician [Detail Below]
- ii: Specific Demographic [Detail Below]
- iii: Business Organisation [Detail Below]
- iv: International [Detail Below]
- v: NGO [Detail Below]
- vi: Government
- vii: National Population
- viii: Community

**SPECIFIED POWER FOCUS:**

**NUMBER OF CITATIONS OF PRIMARY POWER FOCUS**

**SECONDARY POWER FOCUS:**

- i: Specific Politician [Detail Below]
- ii: Specific Demographic [Detail Below]
- iii: Business Organisation [Detail Below]
- iv: International [Detail Below]
- v: NGO [Detail Below]
- vi: Government
- vii: National Population
- viii: Community

**SPECIFIED POWER FOCUS:**

**NUMBER OF CITATION OF SECONDARY POWER FOCUS**

**STATE OF POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY FOCI:**

- i: Collaborative
- ii: Fractured
- iii: Opposed
- iv: Not Addressed

**REPRESENTATION OF TARGET POPULATION:**

- i: Inference (Statements *infer* something associated with public opinion: No citation or systematic evidence provided)
- ii: Impersonation (Statements take on the voice of the reader: Assumed Target Population)
- iii: Vox Pop / Direct Quotation
- iv: Opinion Poll / Survey
- v: Protest / Demonstration
- vi: Not Acknowledged

**TONE IN WHICH THE TARGET POPULATION IS ADDRESSED:**

- i: Positive
- ii: Negative
- iii: Ambivalent
- iv: Not Addressed

**FREQUENCY OF TERMS**

- i: Scottish Referendum
- ii: Political Posturing/Manoeuvring
- iii: Environment


- iv: Climate-Change
- v: Uncertainty
- vi: Investment
- vii: Corporate
- viii: Anti-Fracking
- ix: Fracking Ban
- x: Local opposition to Fracking
- xi: Replace Coal/Alternative Fossil Fuel
- xii: Needed/Necessary


### **Appendix 3: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Interview Schedule**

#### *Topic: Social Media*

I: Can you tell me how you understand the term “social media”?

Prompts: What does it mean?

What makes social media different from other media like television?

II: Can you tell me what place social media has in your life at the moment?

Prompts: *What sorts of social media do you use?*

*How do you use social media in your day to day?*

*-What things do you use it for?*

*-What do you think other people use it for?*

III: How do you feel about your time spent on social media?

Prompts: *Do you feel it is time well spent?*

*-why?*

*-why not?*

IV: Can you tell me about an experience you have had on social media during a major event?

Prompts: *World Cup, News Event...*

*-Do you think the coverage was accurate?*

*-Did it change the experience of the event?*

V: Can you tell me about how you feel about social media as a news platform?

Prompts: *How does it compare to other news sources?*

*Is it a reliable source? If not why not?*

#### *Topic: News Engagement*

I: Could you tell me how you access information on current events and other news?

Prompts: *Why these channels?*

*What makes these better than others?*

*Do you feel they do a good job reporting the stories you are interested in?*

II: Can you tell me what the role of news organisations is with regards to politics?



Prompts: *Do they do a good job?*

*Do you get all the information you need?*

*-If not why not?*

III: How do you feel newspapers and other news organisation report the news?

Prompts: *Is this different to social media?*

*Do you feel you can trust what these organisations report?*

*-If not why not?*

*What makes .... more trustworthy than the others?*

IV: Can you tell me about a significant event you saw reported in the news?

Prompts: *Did you get all the information you wanted?*

*-If not why do you think it was not included?*

*How did you feel reading/watching the story unfold?*

*Topic: Political Engagement/Efficacy*

I: Can you tell me about you engagement with politics?

Prompts: *This is not restricted to voting but anything you feel is relevant.*

*If you don't get involved why not?*

II: Do you feel you have anything important to contribute to politics?

Prompts: *Do you think the government has made an effort to listen to younger people?*

*-If not why not?*

III: Do you feel that the government wants you involved in politics as a young person?

Prompts: *Can you tell me about an experience you have had where this is the case?*

IV: To what extent do you think you can make a difference to how the country is run?

Prompts: *If you don't think you can why not?*

*Is there something that could be done to help you feel like you could?*

V: Can you tell me what you experience of politics online?

Prompts: *Is it different to other types of politics?*

*-If so why?*

*Are you involved online, what makes you get involved there?*

VI: Whose responsibility is it to get people involved with politics?

Prompts: *Government?*

*The Press?*

*Why?*

VII: What do you think could be done to help young people get more involved in the political process?

## Appendix 4: Quantitative Questionnaire

### Participant Information and Consent

#### Project Purpose and Procedures:

This study intends to explore the relationship between political opinions, the media and engagement. The questionnaire that you will complete contains a number of measures designed to assess, social media use, engagement with politics and overall self-efficacy. Please read and tick the below statements before signing this form. The data obtained through this questionnaire will remain confidential and will be destroyed on request should you wish to withdraw after completion. It is hoped that you will take the time to complete the questions to the best of your ability.

I understand that my participation study is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences.

- Yes
- No

I have been informed that I am not obliged to answer any questions I do not wish to, but in doing so will result in removal from the study.

- Yes
- No

I confirm that I am a British National Aged 18-25.

- Yes
- No

If you have any questions or require further information about the project, you may contact Patrick Readshaw

Email: [p.j.readshaw68@canterbury.ac.uk](mailto:p.j.readshaw68@canterbury.ac.uk)

Telephone: REMOVED

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First, we would like to collect some background information about you, regarding your age, gender and media consumption. Please be aware that anything you tell us will be kept in the strictest confidence. We will only use this information for statistical (data analysis and comparison) purposes.

Are you Male or Female?

- Male
- Female

What is your age?

\_\_\_\_\_ Age

Which of these are your main sources of political news and information? You can select up to three.

- Television
- Tabloid newspapers
- Radio
- News websites
- Broadsheet newspapers
- Friends and/or family
- Social Media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)
- I Do Not Follow Political News

How satisfied are you with the way the media reports politics in the UK? (*Will skip subsequent question if satisfaction is selected*)

- Very Dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Somewhat Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied

Is your dissatisfaction with the way the media reports politics related to any of the following? Would you say reports often...? (You may select multiple responses)

- Don't present the full facts
- Make little or no attempt to present a story in a balanced way
- Try to make people unnecessarily scared or angry
- Don't explain the matter they're discussing in a clear way
- Make little or no effort to report positive political news
- Are presented in a condescending way
- Contain nothing of interest to me, my family or my work
- Use technical language and terms people find hard to understand
- Make little or no attempt to explain why this should matter to me
- Make light of serious matters
- None of these
- Don't know
- I am Satisfied with British Political Coverage

Please tell me which, if any, of these types of media the statements apply to (You may select multiple responses)

	Broadsheet Newspapers	Tabloid Newspapers	Television News programmes	Radio News Programmes	Social Media and Blogs
They look to tarnish the name of politicians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They focus on negative stories about politics and politicians	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
They are more interested in getting a good story than telling the truth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How frequently do you do each of the following?

	At least daily	At least weekly	At least monthly	Less than monthly	Never
Use Social Media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Read a Newspaper	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Watch the Television News	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discuss Current Events with Friends	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In a TYPICAL day how many hours do you spend doing the following?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Using Social Media
- \_\_\_\_\_ Reading a Newspaper
- \_\_\_\_\_ Discussing Current Events
- \_\_\_\_\_ Watching Television

Thinking about your overall use of social media, how is time divided between reading about current events and personal browsing?

\_\_\_\_\_ (%) Reading about Current Events

\_\_\_\_\_ (%) Personal Browsing

For each of the following statements, please select the point on the scale that best represents your opinion.

With my chosen political party I obtain what I look for in politics

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

My chosen political party meets my expectations.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I feel confidence in my chosen political party.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

My chosen political party never disappoints me.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

My chosen political party is not constant in satisfying my needs.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

My chosen political party would be honest and sincere in addressing my concerns.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

My chosen political party would make any effort to satisfy me as a member of society.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I could rely on my political party to solve the problem.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

My chosen political party would be interested in my satisfaction.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

For each of the following statements, please select the point on the scale that best represents your opinion of your own abilities. You are able to...

State your own political opinion openly, even in clearly hostile settings.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Make certain that the political representatives you voted for honour their commitments to the electorate.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Promote public initiatives to support political programs that you believe are just.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Maintain personal relationships with representatives of national government authorities.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Play a decisive role in the choice of the leaders of political movements to which you belong, or to which you are near.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Carry out effective information campaign for the political movement or party with which you concur regarding beliefs and programs.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Actively promote the election of political candidates you trust.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Promote effective activities of information and mobilization in your own community (of work, friends and family), to sustain political programs in which you believe.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Collect a substantial amount of money to sustain the activities of your party.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Use the means you have as a citizen to critically monitor the actions of your political representatives.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

For each of the following statements, please select the point on the scale that you feel is most appropriate in describing you.

I can always solve problems if I try hard enough.

- Not true at all
- Somewhat true
- Moderately true
- Exactly true

If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.

- Not true at all
- Somewhat true
- Moderately true
- Exactly true

It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.

- Not true at all
- Somewhat true
- Moderately true
- Exactly true

I am confident I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.

- Not true at all
- Somewhat true
- Moderately true
- Exactly true

Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.

- Not true at all
- Somewhat true
- Moderately true
- Exactly true

I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.

- Not true at all
- Somewhat true
- Moderately true
- Exactly true

I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.

- Not true at all
- Somewhat true
- Moderately true
- Exactly true

When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.

- Not true at all
- Somewhat true
- Moderately true
- Exactly true

If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.

- Not true at all
- Somewhat true
- Moderately true
- Exactly true



I can usually handle whatever comes my way.

- Not true at all
- Somewhat true
- Moderately true
- Exactly true

For each of the following statements, please select the point on the scale that best represents your opinion.

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

At times I think I am no good at all.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I am able to do things as well as most other people.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I certainly feel useless at times.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I feel that I'm a person of worth.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I wish I could have more respect for myself.\$

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I take a positive attitude toward myself.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

## Appendix 5.1: Chris' Transcript

R: Can you tell me how you understand the term social media?

I: Social media for me is things like Facebook, Twitter and things that get people talk, mainly on the internet know, because I think we have gone forward to the ways of the internet, most people talk now on Facebook, Twitter and online socially...

R: What makes social media different for other types of media like television or newspapers?

I: I think it is very much easier to converse with people...

R: How do you mean easier?

I: In that there is not as much, you don't have a physical person to look at so you don't have to worry about what they are thinking through facial expressions and what you are visual seeing on their face, and feeling almost judged.

R: Can you tell me a bit more about the judgement of aspect of physical interact?

I: I think people get afraid that they are going to be judged by someone by having a face-to-face conversation with someone social, they are afraid of fitting or their views maybe upsetting other people...

R: Does social media allow you to bypass this?

I: Almost, there are always people out there who want to push a conversation towards why, why do you think that what makes you think like this sort of thing, but I think social media cuts out a lot of the problems people have to voice their opinion.

R: Can you tell me a bit about your experience of voicing your opinions in that way?

I: I have always found it difficult personally and speaking to someone myself it has always been difficult, I have felt like an outlier myself, so going online, so has a child I used to chat on online, typing away at people, it was much easier to talk to people that way but meeting someone you always have got that sort of... you can see what they are thinking and you can see if they are not agreeing with you.

R: Can you describe how you spend you time on social media, particularly with regards to what you have just said?

I: For me I... social media... It is a bit difficult really for me to say... I don't really do a lot of talking socially like that myself... it is a bit difficult for me to answer I think...

R: Can you tell me what place social media has in your life at the moment?

I: For me workwise, I use it for work regularly. I helps very much to get people talking about the things I have in my store and to get people talking about different things and to find different common interests and likes, and to talk about it over social media that way...

R: Can you give me an example of that sort of exchange?

I: For example if I get a new board game in for my store or a new game I can put a post up online going, look we have just got this in, it is pretty good, it is quite interesting when I have played it myself and people have jumped in on the comments and yeah I have played it and I enjoyed playing this character and playing it in this strategy and then someone jumps in and says I enjoyed doing this instead and they both agree that it works.

R: What do you think other people use social media for?

I: I think people just like to be nosy

R: Can you elaborate?

I: I think people get bored of their own lives. I think some people find that daily boring task of getting up going to work, coming back, doing it all over again. So social media puts people in a situation where they can escape that for a little while

R: Ok, can you talk to me a little bit about that aspect of escapism?

I: Its a bit difficult. Interesting question....

R: It could be from your own experience. That would probably be more useful

I: I think people like to talk about their problems or their day, or just... just in general, to other people or maybe friends very far away that just makes them feel better about their day. Because it breaks from the normal... day for them. I think it makes them... more comfortable and feel more in tune with the world rather than what they see inside their four walls from day to day.

R: So how does social media specifically facilitate that?

I: I'm not really sure

R: You don't have to be certain, but in your experience how do you think social media allows you to connect with people?

I: Well, it's very easy, it's very available. It's all there. You can just, a few clicks and off you go, you're there, you can talk to anyone you like. And I think its very difficult for you to... It's much easier than going out of the door, going out to the pub, and then finding people that you have no idea, might be jumping into your conversation, that will be interested.

R: So how do you feel about your time spent on social media?

I: I try and be as productive as I can, personally. Umm... I think a lot of people do it productively, but I also think a lot of people do it just to waste time, as well. I think they are looking for better things to do with their time, but that could be put to better practise.

R: So could you describe how a productive use of social media might be? You've already mentioned your business but what about more socially?

I: Socially, you can get people together, it brings people out of their shell. I think people can actually... Not worry about what they are thinking, and they can find people that they feel comfortable talking to and easily make more, and newer friends.

R: Is there anything else you can potentially use social media for?

I: I think you can definitely put positive vibes in the way. If you feel very strongly about something and want to start a campaign or petition. I think you can find like minded people that will support your cause.

R: Do you have any sort of experience of that?

I: Not me personally, no I think personally petitions don't work.

R: And why is that?

I: Because I think that whatever is in place, will always be in place. I think it's a great idea to... feel the need that you can change, because the world can't change until one person feels that they can, but I think that not enough people will listen to the cries that go out when people are trying to make a difference.

R: Is that something that is uniquely online?

I: No.

R: Is there anything different about, let's call it real life, vs. online that you think there would be any better ground gained from?

I: I think you could address a much larger audience on social media, compared to people around your area, and hopefully spread outside of that. You find much more people that will support your cause, making it much easier online.

R: Can you tell me a little bit about experience you've had on social media during a major event?

I: What kind of major event? In life?

R: However you want to interpret that.

I: Sure... There's been many for example, there's been many newscasts, umm... that I kind of hear about, and you go online, and it's all over social media straight away. Umm... I think people use it as a gateway to talk about something that's happened recently, but my personal experience, people are very quick to jump on something they can all talk about.

R: Ok, so any examples of that?

I: Recently, the... the... accident that happened in Scotland, that was all over the news, and very very tragic, but... people even though people were all getting together saying lights out at a certain time and hope you will all join in, that was a really good cause... But people also use it in a bad way, in the fact that they make terrible jokes as well, and I think that puts a much nastier negative on social media, and gives it a bad name.

R: And how do you... You've mentioned the accident's in Glasgow, what level of involvement did you have to do with that?

I: Me directly, personally, not anything at all, I mean I've got my stepdad recently met his sister over this, but had a lot of impact on him on him almost, and people around them, so he heard quite a lot about it, so was quite involved. But because you're so far away from it, it just proves that social media is just that, it puts together people that are far away.

R: Is there any sort of examples of events or situations that you have got involved with or followed more closely?

I: I haven't really no... I don't really use it enough, in that kind of way to use it...

R: So how frequently do use social media?

I: For me, it's every day... I like to... Yeah, its every day I'd say because I like to be... I use it a lot for work as opposed to personally. Personally I use it for, again just to see how everyone is doing, see what's going on in the world, see whats happening outside the four walls, of day to day life, it gets you interested, you also then leave the house, you can try and talk to someone about it, did you hear about this, did you hear about that. It kind of sets you up for your day. I think some people use it as their morning coffee.

R: Ok, can you tell me a little bit more about that component of it being someone's morning coffee?

I: It's something you can't, its almost like something you can't do without, you get yourself into a situation where, you, you feel like you need it, but you don't really.

R: How do you mean?

I: You don't need a cup of coffee to get up in the morning, to get on with your day, but because you're so used to it, you kind of feel like you have to, because your body is ready for it, it's used to it. Where again social media, you look into it, and think oh I was on there this morning, whatas changed since the hours since I've slept, which isnt a lot, if you think about it from day to day, but there's always something new to talk about, and people have to know.

R: so, we've touched on the idea of, covering particular events. What extent do you think the coverage of those events could be considered accurate?

I: This is the thing with news and media isn't it? I think it's used to scare people.

R: On social media?

I: On social media, and news and any kind of way really to be honest, that grasp a lot of attention, because bad news will always sell better and get more attention. I think most of the facts they put in there are facts, but it wouldn't surprise me if a lot of it was... created to make it sound better. Or worse in that matter

R: Can you elaborate?

I: I think the thing is, for example if you look in newspapers, this thing that happen to this person, everyone was really upsert, or happy, but you read through the lines, and between those lines, you see a lot of filler to get you involved in that situation, to make you feel like you were almost there. Umm... but you weren't, but that kind of for me relates to the whole, what's real and what's not, you get brought into something that really didn't happen, it's no concern of yours whatsoever.

R: Ok, so, taking this, Glasgow accident, the sort of coverage that you saw on social media, did that change your interpretation of the event?

I: Not really, because it was still along the same lines of what I had seen, you kind of get the gist of a lot of the things most of the time don't you, you kind of become just, reinforce what you already know.

R: Can you tell me a little bit about how you feel social media could perform as a news platform or as a new... You mention that you see stories on there, what do you think of it as a news platform?

I: I... It's... good if it's used correctly, but I don't think it's used to it's full potential in the right way. Umm... just because again with the whole news, being bad, I think becauser there's a lot of negative vibes, you can offend people quite quickly, and going back to people using their feelings, I think people get offended quite quickly and therefore will be more inclined to reply on social media with a negative comment to try and stir a bit of... um... a confrontation with someone, through the fact that they don't have to physically be there. So, it can be used, I think, in a very very positive way, but, I don't think it has yet.

R: So how could you use it in a positive way?

I: I think... I think... you can't do it 100% because you're always going to upset someone, theres always going to be someone who is going to find the bad side of it. But, just addressing the main points that are important, rather than the fluff... the bad fluff behind the stories. I think you should focus more on this happened, it's very sad, but what we are doing is this to make it all better, rather than it's been a negative post all the way through to the end.

R: So do you think there is much of the positive attitude in the coverage of various events that you see on Facebook?

I: Absolutely, I think you can definitely get much positive vibe across through social media, and it usually is... Umm... but there's also people that, there's always a counterbalance as well, that people are putting negative comments as well. But the majority, I'd say is positive, because people are trying to make a difference in the world, there''s more people in the world trying to make a change then there are people who don't want to make a change.

R: You've mentioned, we've talks about Facebook, have you got much experience of something like Twitter?

I: I personally haven't no, I know of it.

R: Is there any particular reason why you haven't engaged with that as a medium as opposed to Facebook?

I: I think Facebook fills the needs that I need at the moment.

R: Which are?

I: Um... Just getting to talk to people that you meet randomly, going to a pub, or meet during a shop or you just friends from school that you haven't spoken to for years, why do it on two networks when you can just have it all in one. I think it confuses the matter.

R: What do you think other people that do use Twitter use it for?

I: I just think they like to be part of it all. I think people like to feel that they have a say in everything, which is great, and you should have a say in what you feel strongly about, but for me, personally, it just confuses the matter by putting too many, its like seeing the same thing, in the same place, but on a different area, in a different area.

R: So can you kind of describe for me the differences between Twitter and Facebook?

I: I know you can talk a lot about, different things, and post different things on Facebook, um, but Twitter I know you can just follow people and see what they are doing, and even though you can see what each other is doing, you can't be interact very much with each other, you can put a couple of comments, but its very limited in what you can say, whereas Facebook gives you a much more, wide range of things that you can talk about and get engaged with.

R: Could you tell me a little bit about how you access information on current events in general? This is broad petcrum, any way that you go about it.

I: I like to listen to a lot of people, I like to listen... to see what people are talking about, because I think that's what the problem with social media. I think it's becoming antisocial, in the fact that everyone is all in this one place, and not actually really talking to anyone. I always think you should listen twice as much as you talk, because you've got two ears and one mouth! But that's how I like, I like to listen, I like to get involved with people, I like to draw them into a conversation, if I ever hear what they are saying, in the street or in the store, I like to make a joking comment, and you can kind of get a conversation out of someone just by talking about what their interest is.

R: So is that the only way that you find out information about current events?

I: Very rarely, I don't watch much TV. I personally don't see the point in watching something that's not really very interesting. I don't find a lot on TV interesting, but maybe passing by television... That would be the only way I would hear about something.

R: So why don't you think that TV is as useful for you?

I: Um... I personally feel TV and news coverage on TV is very negative. I don't feel that there is enough positive vibe coming through my tv screen from people on, sitting behind a counter with a load of bad

news in front of them. They do try to add a bit of Jenny had a birthday and it's great because she's recovering from this that and the other, but it's kind of a sandwich effect, but it's the wrong way around, its two negatives with a positive in the middle whereas it should be the other way around, it should be two positives and a negative. And, it's just to get people grasp oh that's awful, its terrible, I hope their ok, and people seem to empathise with other people because they feel they can link themselves to it, when realistically, they weren't really there, they don't know those people, but they can feel like they are part of it, and I don't like to be dragged into a negative environment, which I feel the TV brings out.

R: In relation, you've mentioned two negatives to a positive in television, would that sort of analogy, how would you describe social media?

I: Umm...

R: on a similar event, how would you kind of...

I: I think a lot of people have a chance to talk about it, whereas the news, you are looking at it, and you only get to talk to the people around you, but on social media, you can see it around with people, looking at it, and talk to people about it, put your own thoughts and comments there, and get involved, which I think, is a much more positive way of approaching things, because you're getting to talk about the things, and get a much better understanding.

R: so do you think this level of interaction is an important aspect of understanding how these current events unfold?

I: yeah, I think it's definitely a way forward, because we need to learn how to deal with it, and how to, if you can't deal with something, that there are places to go for example, and people to talk to, and just generally find common ground with each other, and be able to talk to people that you can't normally do in the street.

R: Could you tell me a little bit about how you see news organisations getting involved with politics, what is their role in the political system?

I: ... To kind of get everyone talking about it. I... I think again, people are just interested, this person from this political party is saying one thing, but the other political party is going against that, but I'm sitting here thinking, do any of them really mean anything, are they just saying that to grasp the attention of people, because realistically that whats they need isnt it, they just need people's attention.

R: Can you elaborate? Why just their attention?

I: So that they can get more of a figurehead really, they can just, you hear about that person, he's doing this or shes doing that, but what about this other person, they are trying to do something different, and if they can get themselves across much better, like they are definitely going to do their



policies, or they feel they are approaching the people on a much more personal level, they will do better in maybe a general election for example, or just generally being people to talk to or people that can be seen as one of the people rather than someone who almost talks to the people.

R: Do you think the news organisations do a good job on covering politics?

I: I think they put what information they need to, I don't think they put the whole elaborate story in place, I just think they put the relevant information they are told to do, probably through the parties that want to get their point across.

R: Can you elaborate a little on that?

I: I think news people would seem to just talk about things that are put in place, and then elaborate on just that one key point rather than see that's a really good point, say they have ten really good, ten things that they are going to do, and they pick two or three of them. They won't then jump onto one of the other seven that they've chosen, because it might not be as interesting, they might not think it's what the people want to hear, but will they do the policies they've said in the first place, they are just picking up the ones they feel approach everyone right, and I think we as a collective group of people need to know everything that's going on, rather than what the news media think we want to hear.

R: Do you think you get the information that you need?

I: Not all of it.

R: Can you elaborate?

I: Because, again it's just the whole, I think you get told what they want you to hear, you don't really. The thing is, people ourselves, we can't talk back to them, we just have to listen, we just have to absorb it all, we don't get a choice. Social media, you can go online you can talk about everything, did you hear about all these other plans he or she was doing? No I didn't, that's really changed my mind, so I think it's just to draw in the people's attention really.

R: How do you feel newspapers and other news organisations report on the news?

I: I think they report, they come across very professional, don't they? I think they've always got these people that are very well spoken, well dressed, and you think oh he looks important, oh he's got something good to say, he's talking rather very well spoken, he must be very high up in the democratic place of people, he must be very very good. Let's listen to him. I, again, newspapers, articles that grab interest, people that have done these wonderful things, it's great. The thing is you don't full read a newspaper, I don't personally know anyone who's sat down and read every single word of a newspaper, less alone taken in all the information that they've actually genuinely read.

R: Why do you think that might be?

I: Too much, they have got too much time, they haven't got enough time on their hands to do what they want to do, they just want to read the things that catch their eye, that's why you have headlines, to grab the attention of they feel you need to hear.

R: You mentioned that newsreaders are often presentable, do you think there is a reason for this?

I: I think its very nice, how they appeal to people, because, you are definitely going to be more interested and listen to someone who talks properly to you and be able to portray the information they want you to hear, rather than someone who's very, the slums of the area should we say, who doesnt really know what they are talking about as much as, maybe someone who looks like they know what they are talking about. I think looking, its all about how they look and how they sound afterwards. I think it's very important for the media's to get someone interested because that's where it all starts. Because if not, youre just going to flick the channel on telly, for example. Newspaperwise, you've got people you get pictures of this person you've seen shaking this persons hand, they all look like they are trying to actively do something, and I think that's what they are actively trying to put across, so these people are doing something, listen to them.

R: So do you think you can trust the information that is provided because of the way they present it?

I: I think you can trust it to an extent. because I... going to what I ssaid before I don't think you are told everything you have to then take what you have been given and don't just accept it but understand yourself why you have accepted it, lets go online lets go do some research lets go talk to people lets find out why... why I have processed that information in my head.

R: Can you describe how you go about researching this information personally?

I: Ummm... I can't think of an example where I have gone and done that but I... the only place I can do that is by elaborating on it at work... somebody has commented to me and spoken about something.... and I... I go is that true oh really I didn't that I only knew x y z I want to know the rest of the alphabet I will go online and have a little research on google for example and I will try and gather as much information as I can, also I can then have a conversation back to the next person who may feel they want to chat about it, that way we are all spreading information, I think we can't just go from what one person says because unless you hear it from the horses mouth what can you really believe?

R: Do you think that news organisations foster this transmission of information?

I: I don't think they do I think they put enough of the key information in for you to not want to go have a look because that will make you think well why did they say just what they said... I think the put just enough information in so you sit down and accept it and then have a conversation about it, but you don't really know what you are talking about.

R: Do you think that is deliberate?

I: Yes

R: And why is that?

I: Because ummm... they want to grasp people's attention in a way that is almost mindboggling, it is almost like you are being turned into a robot, a drone you are being told what to do ummm... you are brought in and drawn into what you want to hear or what they think you want to hear and you I think is this what I want to believe I think it is very easy in people's lives to sit down and go yeah that is what I want to hear, I can accept that, I can talk about that, that is something I can talk about for my day over lunch, but... I think that is why, it is easier for them to do that because people will talk about it ummm... around the workplace or maybe down the street or passing at the post office for example... people like to talk about something so if you give them enough key information they feel like they are intelligent enough to have a conversation about that.

R: Do you think that that translates onto social media?

I: Yes you see a lot of posts online, it is almost like a headline, it has a sort of bolder text that grasps your eye and you kind of think and you click on it and it takes you to another page with soo much information I think that scares people off, you get a little bit of information, I was quite interested in that you get this whole A4 page maybe even more of information of reading but some people will go actually I don't have time for that I don't want to read that much and then will dive of so it scares people off as well. So yes it grasps the attention of people but whether or not they want to go on in depth on social network because they have a much better cat picture to look at or cat video to look at because it has just been posted up or their friend has just passed their driving test you know so much is going on on social media that you kind of get lost in what is important to look at...

R: How do you personally identify what is important to look at?

I: Whatever is interesting to you I think, it varies between person to person, kind of where you come from in your life and what you are interested in depends on what you click on and where... what you want to talk about that day you might have heard someone talking about soemthing and go oh I head someone talking about that an hour ago that post is quite relevant lets have a look I guess that is what grabs peoples attention...

R: What about you specifically?

I: Ummm... Me personally I like to pick something out that I can learn from that I can widen my knowledge about something. Say somebody came by... into my store and wanted to chat I could talk about it and I sound like I know what I am talking about but realistically do I? Or have I just read and processed the information in my head of what have I done.

R: What sort of topics do you seek out to chat about?

I: Kind of see where the country is going or outside the country. See what other people are trying to do for the country... mainly I like to see what is going on in my local area to make sure that I am in a

good place that I am in a safe place or you know where is the best place to eat for example it depends what you day is, you might want to take a take out on the evening and someone says oh these most recent rating have come out for all these food places, lets have a look at that because that is relevant to me at the time and you can then take that with you and you can say I have just read this so lets go there tonight.

R: Can you tell me about an experience you remember being covered by a news organisation?

I: News again gives you pictures of the, you don't see everything, you don't want to see, there are some people out there that are that interested they want to see from point A to point B [Glasgow Crash] but the news can't show that because they don't feel it is right and they are right you can't show, you can't see an accident happening progress that isn't humane or right on top of that people won't want to see that mainly, so why would you post that so people could or even publish that because people would turn off or change channel because people would. Ummm... I think again if you take it online to social media he is the crash from A to B, from point A to point B where it finishes, people who want to be interested will click on it and I think that is a massive difference that is how many people you are approaching. You can approach the world with news, but... are people really that interested are people that wanting to see from that point there to there, people that were victims and going deep into that, you can't really ask those questions to your TV but if it is put in front of you on an online webpage you can click wherever you like and you can find your own information for yourself and you have information that you are interested in and maybe find someone else to talk about.

R: Is there greater access to information online than through news organisations?

I: Absolutely yes

R: Do you think it has been designed that way?

I: I don't think it has been set up that way purposely I think it is just because it is easier to put all the information online that people might want to hear rather than putting it where people might not want to hear it, because lets... if you want to talk about news people want to hear 5 mins about something that is important not this victim had two dogs and she was married to this person and he had a sister over in Wales, they want to know about that, you don't want to talk about that online... on the TV because that is not important at the time where people who are interested in other peoples lives they can dive as deep as the like and I think it is just mainly so people can be grasped at the time.

R: How do news organisations decide on the information that you need to hear?

I: I think it is people, places... ummm... and actions

R: Can you elaborate?

I: Yeah... People because lets be honest celebrities are always in the public eye or at least try to be... because of their lifestyule and the way they do things. recently we have had Stephen Fry saying he is ... has announced his marriage proposal to his other half Elliot. Ummm... but you know that is important that is people and it is two people and it is their actions and we don't even know where it is going to happn yet and that is what we wanna know, we want to know where it is going to happen and when it is going to happen so they have put very point keys there to grab peoples attention, myself I looked at it and was like ahhh thats great it was kind of relevant to me, I like Stephen Fry and he has been on things like QI and he has been in the recent Hobbit films it is very recent. So they thought lets jump on that he has been in the public eye quite recently he is doing this ummm... and literally the caption said Stephen Fry proposes and that is what pick you up and puts you into the situation and I was clicking and having a read and... it is... people like to know what everyone else is doing. People like celebrities and peole that are unfortunate as victims people that have celebrated... different events it is all something people want to know. It is very strange how we want to know and jump into other peoples lives I think we find boredom in our own so we what to find what other people are doing that is so exciting lets jump into it.

R: Taking this Stephen Fry story can you tell me what you were thinking and feeling as you watched the story unfold?

I: I was... I was intrigued straight away, this person I didn't even know he had a partner at the time you know and then as I dived into it and found out that he was with... they had been together for a year and that is information that I didn't have but I had to access it. That information wasn't relevant to the main post. I was very good how I could just jump into that and I have learnt enough to now talk to you or anyone else about it now.

R: Can you tell me a little about your engagement with politics?

I: Me personally and it is a bit of a taboo I suppose, I don't like to use the phrase I don't do politics but I don't really see the point

R: Can you explain?

I: I think it is great that we have these people in place that want... and I use that want very lightly to make a difference in the world in what were doing and how we see to do things, but I feel that none of them really come to fruition, I fell like they are really putting policies and things they want to do in place, they feel will potentially be able to do, if th chance arises for them, but mainly just to grab peoples, again, attention, and say oh yeah that is quite relevant to me, I, Im going to vote for this person, but I dont think we ever see a big enough change to make a difference in politics.

R: You've mentioned you don't want to get involved in politics, can you tell me about why you personally don't want to get involved?

I: I think its a lot of hassle,... there's so much going on with different parties, they all could be right, but they all could be wrong, and how do you differentiate between that, without putting your own views towards them, that's how people get drawn into it, again, you get drawn in by the persons, what they want to do, and what they say they are going to do, but for me, I can't really say that... I want the world to change, because at the end of the day I think we should just... I think we should just be able to get along, why does it take 10 different people to have 10 different ways of doing that, why cant they all come together as one, and have a big talk about it, rather than have a huge debate with one another, because they dont see eye to eye, because thats it, we dont see eye to eye, why does one person, once theyve come into power, youve got another 9, for example, another 9 groups of people who now dont agree with that person coming into power, because they havent voted or they don't believe in that, so I think the issue of making one party very very happy, and they may do a very good job of changing the world or the way they see things, but youve upset 9, and that overturn, thats a huge amount, maybe if it was 50/50, then maybe ok, everything is balanced, lets get on with it, but youre upsetting 9 different people in my example, and thats a huge amount of different groups, and they are all going to be clashing against each other, so I dont think it helps the situation in any way shape or form because youre just putting different people, and its like musical chairs, youre putting one person in, lets make everyone feel better about it, umm... but theres going to be lots of other people that don't agree, and when the next time comes around, lets just make some new politics to shift it all around again.

R: Do you think you feel like you have anything to contribute to politics?

I: I dont think, even if I voted, which I don't, I dont because I dont feel its worth it, I dont feel my vote will make a difference, and I know thats crazy because if everyone said that, it would make a difference, but the way its portrayed to me, I dont feel it matters if I vote or not, because no matter what happens, they are all going to go back on their word, or not get around to doin the things they want to do because they caught up in everything else that is thrown upon them.

R: Could you give any examples?

I: Umm... I havent got any examples myself, I just think that people get... I dont think politicians... know what they are letting themselves in for, I feel like they want to make a difference at first, and thats great, and thats fantastic and everyone should follow what they want to do, but when you come into power, you you have everything just thrown onto you and you kind of go, oh I've got to do that, oh I've got to do this, I cant get around to doing what I want to do, and once you've finished doing it, and youve got round to doing what you want to do, the elections over, and you know, and its time to have someone else to take your place if youre not liked or you havent been picked or, you dont want to be chosen again because you havent got round to doing what you want to do.

R: Is the reason you don't get involved because you don't feel like you're very well represented?

I: Its not a case of I don't feel I can connect with, with them myself, I dont feel like I have that common ground, because I dont think they are going to do what they say, I think they are just saying what people want to hear, so I dont feel like I can personally get involved with them and talk about them, because, again, in my example of 10 different groups of people, if I then have my say about what I believe in, in for example etc etc etc, and I approach one of the other 9 groups that could potentially come up to me, I've then got a confrontation on my hands, because Im agreeing with something they disagree with, and I have a 90% chance of arguing with someone... I dont like that, Id rather have a 90% chance of having a good conversation, a lighthearted conversation, lets all get together and have a talk about something rather than lets find something we can both argue about.

R: How do you think you could initiate a dialogue with politicians that would let you see what is happening?

I: I think... its very difficult to do so, I dont think you could have a politician come into power, and go, Im doing what I want to do, because I dont think they are allowed to, that's just my thoughts, I dont think they get the chance to, I think, like I said, they come into power, and they have all these things to do, and they cant do what they want to do, and as much as they would like to, I mean If i was to come into power, I would like to do some very interesting things, like make, Id like to make things much more equal, but how would I go about doing that without causing problems, and I think that is the main reason, youre always going to upset someone, I dont think you can approach this in a positive way to affect everyone because everyone is going to think differently to one another, and I think people as a community, as a whole, just like to argue.

R: Do you feel that this conflict through differing ideas is a negative thing?

I: No... I dont think it is at all, I think that its great that we all have ideas and that we need to put our heads together, bu the way we approach is, is the wrong thing, we approach it in a way where we say youre wrong, Im right, and thats the wrong attitude, you should come across more, I think Im right, but Im going to take on board what you are saying, lets come together, and lets make something twice as good as we could individually.

R: Have you got any experience where that has been the case?

I: I mean, I try to converse with people, and talk to people saying, I can see your point, for example, this is this, but why dont you sit from this point of view, and I give them my view of things. I always sit on the fence with people, I kind of, I can always see b oth sides of the coin, and I am very lucky in being able to do so, but I can also see, how difficult other people try to take that in, umm, its like they have their own idea in their head, and its very difficult to shift from that. I Mean, you can talk about anything, you know, some argument that they had with their girlfriend or significant other, or you

know, and you could say, well I can see why she or he said that, but have you ever thought if you were in their shoes, cause you imagine how you would feel, and they cant process that, because they werent going through it or they havent been through it before, so i think its very difficult for people to come together like that, and make people see what they want to see, because theyve experienced one thing but not the other, and I dont think people have the insight enough to think in other peoples shoes.

R: Do you feel that the government itself is interested in having you, as a young person, involved in politics?

I: I think they are, because I think they want to, I think were a specialised group in their eyes, where we are the future, we are whats going to be making... the new buildings the new people that work, the new businesses, new ideas, so I think they are very very interewsted in what we have to say, but not quite sure again, how to take it on, because they might come from a different background as you and I, umm... they might not know how to approach things.

R: So how do you think they should go about approaching young people?

I: I think... it would be to say, get involved, but how do you do that, you cant get involved in something youre not interested in, and even if you try to youre not going to be full hearted into it, because youre not interested in it, so i think it's very difficult for them to get it right, umm... just because they are not quite sure how to do it right, they would, you could end up alienating people, by looking like youre trying to make an effort but youve messed it all up, so what do you do to approach it, i dont think theres a good way to approach it in my opinion?

R: So how would you like for them to engage with you personally?

I: I like to see, id like them to see how I do things differently, you know, you see a lot of politicians, people that are in power, they often come from a lot of money background in my opinion, or they have a different way of looking at things, and i think if you... if they spent some time doing what I do, or listen to what I the way ive done things, maybe they might have an insight to, maybe it wasnt so easy for him, or maybe it wasnt so easy for her, lets try having some... emphasis on... what it is like to struggle for example, theres a lot of people out there that are struggling, and god knows ive been there before, but we all move on dont we, but I dont think they have that option, I dont think they have that experience that would make them a much better person.

R: Can you tell me, to what extent do you think you could make a difference to how the country is run?

I: I dont know if I.... I personally could make a difference to the country, in the way it is run, again because youre always going to have people that argue, people that dont agree, and it's, people are very pigheaded in my opinion, their opinions matters and that's it, and thats the problem we have, we have people that are too inside their own head, that they want their ideas to work, no one elses ideas



matter, even if it changes their idea slightly, so... me personally i would try, i would try to make things much fairer, so things like working wage, youve got the different age brackets for working wage, I dont think thats right, if youre willing to work, you should be paid the same, because youve got the ability in your head, the work ethic to work hard, perhaps if its not the right way, you start on a certain wage and you work your way up if you prove to be good. Thats great, not just saying, youre 16, youre getting this much, ok your 18, you can have a bit better, why is an 18 year old person better at doing something than a 16 year old? You could have someone much much more intellectual work, and produce something much higher standard or quality with someone at 16, than 18 year old whos just kind of gone, yeah thatll do. So i would try to make things fairer, and that would be the one example I can think of right now.

R: Can you tell me of any experience youve had on politics online?

I: I mean yeah, theres the whole fracking thing, a few months, or few years back, I dont know... But, um, youve got that, people are its everywhere, you hear about it, I think... in... does it make a difference? I dont really think it can, I dont think... petitions make a huge difference because... if they are going to be doing something, they are set in their mind, they would have planned it for years, months and months, and years and years, and were they planning to do, theyll find a way around it, and even if it means postponing something for a few more months or maybe a year, then they will find a way around it, wait till people are more compliant t say, do you know what, our petitions arent working, they worked last time, lets try again, they realise they arent working this time because they are just coming back, theyll com e back again, whats the point? So i think people that have something to say in their head, theyll do it, if its for the benefit of people or not, because lets be hones,t people will do what they want to do because they think its right, and very rarely will people hold up their hands and say, oh sorry I've made a mistake when it turns out to be wrong.

R: Do you think there is a way you would get involved in politics online outside of petitions?

I: Umm... I think its difficult I mean, how else would you gather people together, I mean I dont think you could do it, I dont think you dcould approach it as a way that is not a petition, because a group of people coming together to voice their opinion is you know, going against it isnt it, so thats, um... thats the kind of a defitinion of a protest isnt it, i dont think there is a different way you could tackle it, i think you could maybe try and get more, thats the thing, people not understanding, youve got people talking but no ones listening, so I think the only way you could do it different it and people come together is to actually, lets all come off of online, lets come off tv, lets all get round in a big group and discuss what the problem is, and lets find a solution, thats the only way I can think, we could have a solution to something like that.

R: so do you think there is a difference between online and offline politics?

I: I do, mainly because again people are not afraid to say what they think online and some people prefer to say things online but then again there are people that prefer to have a face to face conversation and say actually... you are wrong I am right this is what I am saying. There are different people in the world and people will find it easier to put it out online but face to face they will get shy about it because they feel their opinion is going to be looked down upon like a kind of underdog kinda comment but if we all came together as a collective group and saying this is us and you lets listen to each other without having an argument without any negativity lets sort out the problems we have. Your differences are my differences and lets come to a compromise that is the only way I think we could do it.

R: Do you think there is a benefit to online anonymity with regards to voicing your political ideas?

I: I don't mainly because it causes... it just causes a bit of a bad atmosphere people will just carry on talking online, you kind of just sit there reading and saying they are just saying that because... you are online you can't see my face you can't say a thing. It is kind of an upfront I am better than you approach so I don't think ummm... that that kind of way of feeling is right but I don't think it can be avoided because think that is how people are.

R: Whose responsibility is it to get people involved with politics?

## Appendix 5.2: Louise's Transcript

R: Can you tell me how you understand the term social media?

I: Ummm... I would would kind of interpret it as any sort sort of social communications between ummm... people using online media and things like that. The ones I am most aware of are things like Twitter and Facebook and things like... well thats all I can think of really. Where you use those kinds of medias to communicate, all different ideas between different people and things like that.

R: What makes these types of media more "social" than other types of media?

I: Ummm... Well I can kinda see it as everyone can kinda interact with it, it is sort of public domain so that that means that all people have access to it thats what I think makes it social and the fact that you interact with people and build relationships and discuss personal things makes it quite social.

R: You have mentioned a level of interaction inherent with the medium what makes this different to other forms like television, radio or newspapers?

I: I think it is quite up to date it changes as soon as you post it, it changes instantly I think newspapers and the news struggle to stay up to date because by the time it has been through all the processes that are involved to filter it and adapt it so that it is appropriate form the general public it is then dated and a little bit... I don't know how you would describe it... not tainted but ummm... I don't know the word it is is just adpated and changed by the perceptions of other people and affected when they are filtering it and making it "appropriate" they are changing what the final result is, whereas social media is the raw material before it has been touched.

R: Can you tell me about an experience you have had of the difference between the rawness of social media vs. the adapted more traditional froms of media?

I: Well from personal experience from being at uni and things like that partiucalrly the london riots when you saw a lot of the social media that was on it did sort of come across as sort of albeit jokey we will join in with this we will copy this, this looks like you know... lets jump on the bandwagon... When it then went onto the news, although they were quite sinister comments and alot of things they were doing were not right in my point of view when it got to the news they acted like it was this big wide spread thing, particularly the news reported that there was going to be a problem in Oxford which is close to where I live and you instantly think this is now going to spread and is going to be horrific when really it was a collection of a few kids who had threatened to do something and were never truly intending on doing it and it kind of made it look much worse than it necessarily was in really life, not that I had any real impact on it it just appeared it was taken a bit out of context.

R: Where did that appearance of something more sinister seem to come from?

I: The news made it seem like it was much worse than it is, and I think alot of the time where you look back at stories there was a lot of things while I was at university we looked into in more depth, like

Palestine and Israel that we looked into what was the source and what it was actually like to live there and in the news in the media that is never played up, it is never played up that there's not a particularly right or wrong side it is always this is one way this is another and the news and the media make it very black and white but when you have discussions, social media enters in, it is more the raw state, I think you actually what the true news is or what the whole you know, interaction is at least.

R: You mentioned a jokey aspect to getting involved with the riots and a raw state online, to what extent do you feel you can identify what is jokey and what isn't from this raw state?

I: I think a lot of the stuff, the stages that news goes through to be processed and ready for the news. I believe must go through multiple filters, you know. Before or after watershed you can say that they had guns or that they didn't have guns, and I think because you have to filter it and almost water it down it takes away a lot of the things that as human beings you are able to ummm... sort of pick up... you know the language people use in text messaging and online messages and things like that... you can pick up on whether it is a joke or whether it is not, but when you take away all those contexts like the smiley face the punctuation and all different things you then change the meaning of what that one individual meant to say. They might say "haha why don't we just go down to Oxford let's spread this across Oxfordshire Hahaha we will come into the Cotswolds" which the idea of some people would interpret, you know... people are doing it in cities we could technically do it in the rural areas but are we really gonna bother, it is kinda something you interpret but when it was on the news it was far more, it's spreading all over the UK and that this is a widespread problem that they can't keep control of and I think that that is one of the things where you think if you actually read what the original messages were, were they really as... ummm... malicious as they were really intended?

R: Can you tell me a little about the role social media has or has had in your life currently or in the past?

I: I only mainly use Facebook I don't really use any other mode of social media that I would immediately term a social media...

R: Why is that?

I: I kind of see, I don't know whether it is really my generation or not... I kind of term social media as only online so whether it is Twitter or... you know Facebook or things like that I don't particularly use it that much and my pages are always closed, I only deal with my direct relations that I know in real life already so I don't really branch out into the "real world of social media" whereas friends that I know use Twitter to communicate with people they are never going to meet or you know celebrities and all those different things, so I think I am quite closed in comparison to social media I only use it for people I already know to update them on what is happening in my day to day life and I would only really tell the people I would normally tell in real life anyways I you see what I mean...

R: So why Facebook and not Twitter?

I: I don't really understand it [Twitter]...

R: In what sense?

I: It appears to me... to be backwards and forwards... just comments, just this is how my day is whereas I kind of use Facebook instead for look this is what I have done today or this is where I went at the weekend and it is kind of like a diary sort of idea rather than sort of random statements which I presume Twitter is like I have not used it to know... particularly.

R: Can you elaborate on how you use Facebook?

I: Yeah... so I only really use it when big life events or whatever, mainly to post it so people see what I am doing that weekend or when I have really enjoyed making something or something like that. It goes on and just sort of you know... here's what I have done I don't really regularly use it to communicate between people it ummm... it would only be responding to something somebody sent to me, maybe work colleagues saying that's really Christmassy or something like that. Ummm... but I don't seem to... I seem to just look at it to see what other people are doing rather than use it as a way of say... having conversations or debating.

R: And why do you think that is?

I: Ummm... I think it is maybe because I am a bit more private... I think people who are quite... ummm... out there almost want to tell people what they are doing all the time and they want people to comment and they want to start discussions and things like that, whereas I purely want to see what people are up to and doing.

R: Is that only ever limited to people you know or do you ever expand out to what the country is doing?

I: No... it is only ever a very small collection of people that I know directly in my social circle if you know what I mean... people I know from school or people from work. It wouldn't ever be anybody I haven't met before or spoken to. So it would normally be very close. As far as it would span is people from university who I knew but now live further away.

R: What do you think other people use social media for?

I: Ummm... all I can guess from that is that they give you different like... eh... security options. Do you want it to be just you friends directly? Do you want anybody on Facebook to be able to look you up? and things like that and I know mine is very... only friends not even friends of friends if you see what I mean... can see my particular page or they type my name in, it wouldn't necessarily be me that came up. Which I find is ummm... what I think protects my privacy a bit whereas others from what I gather can post it to everyone. Now I would envision it that they are openly welcoming anyone to have a comment on something they have said or looked up or posted or something like that of which I am only allowing people I know to comment on what I want to show them, ummm... I think Facebook can

be a really good to put ideas forward because you know despite me having my privacy settings I can search other people so if there is a band that I like or if there's people from university that I may not have ever met but knew from other people I could search them and speak to them, people who I haven't spoken to in ages so I think that sort of broadens it out a lot and I know that people might use it for promotions of something or events or things like that. Like at work we have our PR lady who has a facebook pages and she promotes our business using it which quite often you can say we have a new brand out and they then you know share it and the idea spreads and spreads and spreads just like videos that I might watch or find on youtube, that occasionally post and my friends share them and they go on and on and on... so I can only imagine you could use it to, people who are flicking through constantly so it might be it gets picked up a little bit more than using another kind of media.

R: You have said that you use Facebook personally but can you tell me what you think other people use Facebook for?

I: Ummm... normally they post about how they feel?

R: Can you elaborate?

I: About whether they are having a good day or a bad day ummm... somebody has annoyed them or you know... I think it is sometimes thing that I don't think should be on Facebook, things that most regularly appear such as such and such has done this to me or such and such has done that to me... in conjunction with that there are viral videos that people think are funny or adverts and things like that...

R: Can you tell me about your experiences of Facebook during a major event?

I: Ummm... I think it kind of brings people together... I know like... you know... they are not particularly important things like the world cup and that, people say I have just got dot dot dot in the sweepstakes lets hope they win, I remember when the first christmas advert comes out people say oh I have seen this or such and such has come up in X factor and all the big things that it feels everyone is watching because everyone is making a comment about it... ummm... I think things like serious political issues rarely appear...

R: Why do you think that is?

I: I think some people think it is sort of a taboo subject...

R: How so?

I: I think interest in politics at least to me and my friend group, kind of appears to be only really intelligent people have any particular interest and may be you are a little dry and boring if you want to post about the general election or something like that. That maybe they think thats for the older generation rather than ours, so I think quite a lot of the time they talk about the thing that everyone else wants to talk about rather than maybe if they are interested or they don't know who to vote for

or whatever, they can't really envision anyone actually wanting to actually... well... of their own back starting to talk about something like that without it being triggered by something.

R: What do you think has caused this perceived lack of interest?

I: Ummm... I think it is quite interesting, but I think my interest is limited, I think that if I feel like... you might actually find something out by having the discussion you know... that somebody might be able to educate you a little bit on what that might mean what that might actually... interpret it for you. That having a discussion you might actually understand it a bit better. I think that is interesting. I don't really like it if I feel that I am being preached at particularly I wouldn't really like to have big long lists of such and such wants to do this and such and such wants to do that, because I don't that that actually ever accomplishes anything, I want to feel like it has progressed something.

R: Do you think if you were to engage in a discussion like that on Facebook, which of those types of discourse do you think it might be?

I: Ummm... just from... well... I don't know... It depends I suppose on who you were talking to or who was starting the conversation... I think maybe if it was a political party who had set up a page and was telling people, I have an inkling that from websites for those political parties it is just, this is what we do, this is how wonderful we are, this is what we are going to do for you and all those kind of things whereas I think if it was a more raw kind of thing like we were talking about earlier where you know... maybe... people from the local area or somebody I might know directly you might actually have more of that discussion and teaching each other about what might be happening or whatever...

R: Can you tell me a bit about what you think Twitter is used for considering you have said you don't use it yourself?

I: I did try to use it, ummm... but to me I like the pictures and all the other sort of video watching that you can get on Facebook whereas I think on Twitter it appears to me that it is just... just the same as texting someone but to a larger audience and I'd kinda see it as a bit of performing almost, having discussions and yes people reTweet things but it does kind of feel like it is kind of a celebrity pop-culture kind of idea, you Tweet your favourite celebrity to see if they will Tweet you, and I am not overly, particularly bothered by whether people care about what I am saying about it so I don't really care if someone reTweets it if you see what I mean. I don't get any sort of gratification from someone agreeing with what I have been saying because I am already happy with what I already think.

R: Can you go into more detail about how you think other people use it?

I: I think Twitter could be used for more than just celebrity pop-culture but I think that is what it inevitably gets boiled down to, ummm... I think you could use it, you know... to help educate... people I think because it was born out of celebrity you would struggle to really ummm... get it to give you much more than that because you know... you don't have a page you don't have who you are, what

you want, that I know of. I know you have a profile maybe but nothing really about who you are... so you don't really know who you are talking to, you are just talking at people.

R: Do you think that is important to know who you are talking to?

I: Yes

R: Why do you think that?

I: I think that online without knowing that it becomes very cyber it is like having a version of an avatar, if you know what I mean you have a persona that you are on there. But why can't you just tell people who you are, what you are and what you think I don't see why it needs to be so secretive. I find that a bit uncomfortable.

R: What is it about this secretive online identity that you find uncomfortable?

I: There are benefits in that people that aren't so self assured might feel that it is a more comfortable place to be, but me personally I don't struggle with that, so maybe that is why it doesn't work for me necessarily ummm... but I do think... you know the things that are really important like politics or... social ummm... issues I think it is important that people are able to put their point across being them I think that if you are lowering it down to the level where you have to hide behind a persona to be able to tell people what you think, I don't think you are making much of a step forward than if you weren't saying anything at all, because in theory you know... without the courage in your convictions in what you are saying that is not really adding something and it is not really bringing people into the... ummm... the really important issues because they would never stand up and maybe sign a petition because you would have to register maybe... they wouldn't vote because they would have to register and I think is if you you keep it all cyber and all a secret that is what you are encouraging people to be like. So they are never actually going to step forward and actually put their point across in the real life realm which limits the effects they can have.

R: Can you explain exactly what you mean about online politics not really doing things unless it is in "real world"?

I: I think it is good starting point, I think ummm... especially from a work point of view and using it as a PR tool, as it does reach more people by all means, it reaches far more people than leafleting or people wandering around houses, of course it does but I think you would struggle, I would be interested to find out that when you did it leafleting and when you did it online, how many more people you get when you do it one way or the other, because I dare say lots of people would "like it" [online] but whether they would all turn up to the ballot box when it became real life, as opposed to going round and asking people to do it and then seeing whether they came to the ballot box, I think the face to face contact is something you would actually struggle to do, because it is that. You know somebody asks you a question back and you can tell whether they are cross or they are happy



or they are sad, and you can kind of pitch that particular political party/social issue or whatever it is to that person in a personal way, whereas online it is open for interpretation, you don't know whether that person is crying while they are writing that.

R: You mentioned earlier that you are capable of reading into the topics you can convey that sort of emotional information, how does that factor into what you have just said?

I: I think... it is reliant on someone wanting to read into it, so me personally if I see something online and I am not sure how true it is or not I am quite happy to look up and look at news articles and do a little bit of reading around it to try and work out exactly what I think about something before I would vote on it. Whereas I feel others might not, and equally they would, that would limit them ever so slightly, that's maybe the thing, I think the word count [on Twitter] has a lot to do with it because you can't always explain something in 26 characters or whatever it is. Ummm... and I think, I don't know... I am maybe inbetween the two I suppose that there is something that social media can do, and you can read into emails, and messages to a certain degree, but it still doesn't override the face to face contact and interaction of human beings in the real world I suppose...

R: Can you tell me how you feel about the use of social media as a news platform?

I: Ummm... I don't know about whether it could be an alternative, I think the best thing about technology is that you don't have to pick it doesn't have to be one or the other and for me personally you can watch the news then read an article and then have a chat to someone about it and I think personally that is the best way to get an all rounded view of what is going on. For example at work the other day, there was on the A40 there was a lorry fire... ok... we all heard about it had a little chat, where do you think it is, what do you think it is you know... or maybe it is baker boys on fire, blah blah blah and a little man comes down the round and he says no, there is a lorry on the motorway. Somebody then goes online and they look at the witney gazette and the witney gazette says that is a lorry that has caught on fire and whatever else and then it is on the national news and he has unhitched his van because he knew he was on fire and has pulled over and then it has exploded and then there is the discussion on you know... the people on Facebook then saying don't go down the A40 it has been closed for hours blah blah blah and then you go onto the news and well actually one lane was always open and they hadn't closed all of it and it was just because everybody had clogged up because of the time of day it was and you know although I still don't know the actually story of what really happened until much later, I think you know he had unhitched and it had been a problem packaging or whatever it was, all three of those, four of... however many of those it is all added something to that story and it all you know, it all built as you went along and I wouldn't have got all of that from just reading the news paper or just reading Facebook I needed all of those to know exactly or roughly what had actually gone on as it went on, if you see what I mean.

R: How does Social Media compare to Newspapers or Television as News Source?

I: I think it is a much easier way to... synthesise what issues have gone on I think it is in the language you understand, from people that you know so you know... if you have one person that you know who overexaggerates things you know their Facebook statuses are probably going to be a bit more flamboyant than what actually happened, where if someone is a bit more genuine and says such and such is going on, be careful you are more likely go oh ok, I will do that I will keep that in mind and I think that is maybe something the news and the ummm... newspapers struggle with they don't have that personal touch if you see what I mean. You can't really interpret whether that person is being really honest with you or not you just have to take it for what it is...

R: You have mentioned friends that interact with people they have never met what weighting do you think they put on the opinions of those they have never met?

I: Ummm... with myself I would never take their word for it than a person I know... ummm... I would much prefer. I don't know I suppose you develop relationships with people when you are online and I think there are lots of sites that I look on on quite a regular basis that you actually start to have a relationship, an online relationship where you know that 95% of the time you read it another site and it says exactly the same thing. As far as I am concerned if I see it on lots of sites or from different people and they are all saying the same thing that's kinda says that is reasonably credible. So I guess if I have enough sources to check it I can start to believe them...

R: Is the regular process you go through to check something is reliable online?

I: Yeah

R: Do you think online media provides a reliable source of information?

I: No

R: Why is that?

I: I just think that it is so adaptable and changable and so many people can ummm... log in and change things... like wikipedia is a really good example, when you first got to university you thought wikipedia was the best thing since sliced bread because it knew everything about everything and it wasn't til the first couple of semesters that you started looking at other things, well when I was on wikipedia it told me that it was this date then I have looked in books and newspapers and whatever else and they said three sources externally from wikipedia have all said no it was actually this, and with the internet it is so easily changed, books you can't just rip a page out and newspapers you can't just burn and never see them again because they are permanently held in a copy whereas places like wikipedia which is an extreme example but websites can easily be amended and changed as and when they decide I think that is what makes it less reliable I suppose...

R: Could you tell me about how you personally access information on current events?

I: Ummm... Online newspapers, I don't really read paper newspapers

R: Why is that?

I: Ummm... I don't want to pay for them... mainly, online that's the problem, online overrides a lot of other mediums because of the cost of it, who wants to go out and buy a book about a certain... historical event for example, a social event if you can go online and get it for free and it is at a click of a finger rather than having to go to a library or something else and I think you know... me and a lot of other people that I know would much prefer just to go online and click through something to find something rather than get the hardcopy I suppose...

R: You have identified cost as a major contributing factor for your use of online sources are there any other significant aspects that feed into this choice?

I: I don't think they are any better than any other site to be perfectly honest, I do think the money is quite a large contributing factor and equally the ease of accessing it, it is on a page you can access from anywhere, anything you want and whatever you want to access it on and it is more of the ease of doing it, you don't have to plan to go and get something or organise something else and I do think there is not that much more to it, I believe that the stuff that is reported in online newspapers as opposed to what is reported in print are exactly the same form of information in exactly the same amount of filters and just the same as the tele, you come in and you turn it on and it is the same thing that is being broadcast to multiple other people and I think that... I don't think there is much more to it than that really.

R: Can you tell me about what role you see news organisations like newspapers have in politics?

I: I personally think which I just like to say I don't think they do do this, I would like to think that they did was give you an overview. I don't think that the public can cope with the in depth policies of every single party of every single you know, nitty gritty detail but I do think that they owe it to the general public to give you a broad easy to understand ummm... almost idiots guide to the overview of what is going on and then that triggers other people who are interested and want to know, it sends them to the right places for them to start looking into it in more depth. I don't think it is the role of the news to tell you what is right or wrong or who to vote for or who not to vote for, or even to say that this party is better than the other just because they are in power, I don't think that is really supposed to be or was ever the point of them being there but I do think that is what they do now.

R: Can you characterise what you think news organisations are doing if they are not doing what you would like them to be doing?

I: I think what they do a lot of the time is report the most popular point of view. I don't think, a good example, when we were at A level and we used to do politics, well government and politics he would play use the same news paper, same event on BBC news and on FOX from America. FOX is quite

renowned for being quite outlandish in their points of view and maybe almost to the point of you know being a bit bias entirely and just kinda making stuff almost. BBC News don't get me wrong they were more honest and they did give you a bit more of a view but when I then went to university and we did the Palestine and Israel conflict which I talk about alot because I was amazed by the difference that changed my opinion. To start of with knowing nothing about it. I didn't even know what had gone on and what the issues were and how badly the individuals that were living in those circumstances were having it because the news never told me it was that bad. All that it was was the Palestinians are doing this or the Israelis are doing or there is war here or there is a war there and because they report every bad thing that happens in the world it seems to lessen the effect, you seem to become hardened to the fact, well they're fighting again, or and they have just been bombed and because it is on there all the time I know horrible things happen and there is and it is happening really regularly but it is almost that you become desensitived to it almost, it is a normal thing you troops shipping off and they talk about it and Tony Blair or David Cameron, well this is what we need to do and you become hardened to it and forget how much of a horrible thing it is. Because they give you the brief overview that I discussed I am not convinced it is particularly... ummm... neutral they report what they have been told by the government to report. They do kind of desensitise people because they are not saying this many people have been murdered and you know by the way when you go to Boots and you buy a particular good you are buying it from an unpolitical and illegal settlement because nobody tells you that but they do tell you that so and so has blown such and such up but not how that affects your life, not that if you go down the road and put money in that charity box it doesn't end up there it ends up somewhere else. I think thats the thing it almost becomes a bit blurry in the background if that makes sense.

R: Do you think that you get the information you need to understand current events?

I: No

R: And why is that?

I: Ummm... I think a lot of the time it is being politically correct, it is what they think we should know, and I do think sometimes they dumb it down a bit, all you need to know is that it is really crap there so you need to vote for this person because they will make sure it doesn't get that crap here.

R: Who do you think is responsible for that aspect of the news?

I: Ummm. I think that obviously the BBC is a British institution, gets funding from the government right and I don't think many people actually know that lower down the level they just think it is the BBC. If the government own you and the government give you the money you are not going to put out something that slags of the government because you don't get the same amount of funding which makes sense, and I think because it is a British institution, thats lovely, thats wonderful, all for having

British things... the fact that that must have an influence however a little and influence you want it to have it does and I think that's the particular problem. Independent ones... a good example, popular culture admittedly like Jonathan Ross was originally on the BBC and he swore and made a comment he now works on ITV who aren't necessarily funded by the government that I know of ummm... they are more of an independent strand and he is allowed to be on there... so that says to me you are not welcome on the BBC because we don't approve of your language but if you go to someone who isn't owned by the government they think it is absolutely fine and it is entertaining.

R: Taking the independents as you call them where do you think their choice of stories etc. comes from?

I: Selling newspapers

R: How so?

I: I think... that the problem with a newspaper is that businesses like that they cost money to run, there is no way that any business whatsoever could afford to just sell newspapers just because they want to tell people the right thing and educate people and things like that, it is just not a plausible business plan it is just never going to work... and I think sometimes they make an attempt, of course they do, because they all obviously have their own agenda they are linked to particular political parties they all have their own political point of view, not that anyone is ever aware of which one they are playing for at certain times that they are printing their papers. But I think that the fact is that they have to sell newspapers so they need something that is going to grab your attention whether it is blowing something out of proportion or lessening down something that they don't think people want to know about and I just think there are a lot of filters that just go on with newspapers.

R: Do you think that is different to social media?

I: Yeah, because you don't have that filter, you don't... if you say something outlandish, ok your comment might get deleted... ok... but it has been there people have seen it there is nothing anybody else can do about it. There isn't a filter so much you can say such and such is a right idiot or I am not going to vote because of such and such or I think you know... there is just no filters to it it's a bit like protesting almost.

R: Is that a good thing?

I: I think so...

R: Why is that?

I: I think... social... the social ummm... sphere I suppose is you know, has information feeding into it and lets information out and it is its own filter, it tells you whether the BBC are right idiots because they got rid of Jonathan Ross, I bet there were lots of comments made about that, which stops it being the BBC is right because he is gone, there may be a collection of people who have so no that's not right

which is why he might have got on to ITV you see what I mean, so it allows you to actually become a new filter that takes out all the crap that puts in all the good stuff that you think is actually you know useful for you and i think it is something quite good that you could actually learn from, because the information... all of the information comes in both news both every kind of media including social relations comes in and then we filter it out and create new information that we filter out.

R: Can you explain what you mean by filtering?

I: I mean we filter out into social media, so the news, the newspapers, the television program all go into the mixing pot, all the little people who have an opinion on all the different points of view then put on social media what they thought. Jonathan Ross was a right idiot on the BBC I can't believe he is on there or I am really glad Jonathan Ross is back on on ITV a much better place for him to be where he can actually be honest and you can feel he isn't being filtered. It is quite a good example, I just think it stops maybe the TV and newspapers and the government, they can't stop that, that is something that happens naturally...

R: Would you say it is biased then?

I: Ummm... I think they would struggle to make you biased because for everyone one person who thinks something is right there may be two people who think it is wrong and it may be that you get two comments about it being wrong and only one about it being right but you can read both, so that the thing is you may see loads of comments about it being negative but even if there is only one that gives you another point of view that has educated you on that other side. Whereas if it is a newspaper it is coming in one way, you can't discuss with the news reader what did you think about this, because somebody else makes a comment and that changes it completely you might know that is completely wrong and you might not approve of doing that, that's completely inappropriate but all you need is that one person to comment on the other side.

R: Can you tell me about a significant event you saw reported in the news?

I: Ummm...yeah, I suppose it is about that, like I said before previous to going to university I didn't know what went on in Israel so the media as far as I was concerned, the news had not given me any information properly, that explained the story or the whole set up so that I could understand what that news meant, they didn't tell me who had moved in illegally, what had started it, that the British had had quite a lot to do with it, which is why I think they might have skipped over it in the news, because you know we were quite a contributing factor to all the problems that then happened and I think that is maybe why they don't do that. Anyways I didn't know much about it because nobody had ever really brought it up as something that is quite important and because it wasn't to do with my own culture I hadn't looked it up so I didn't know. It was until it came up in one of my course syllabuses that they went through it from the very beginning. It started here, the British did this, it was completely

unfiltered someone who had been over there, seen what it was like, was British could entertain the fact that we did do something right for once and we did scuff something up quite significantly and what the ramifications were. Then when I watched the news later on I understood what that actually meant and I could make an actual opinion, the news sometimes would talk a load of rubbish, one side isn't wrong and one side isn't right there was bad effects on both sides neither of them went particularly well and I think that that is the thing that you are never going to make an opinion if you don't have all the facts to begin with, and I don't mean the facts that are edited and filtered I mean actual... set in stone this is what happened on this date and this is where they went, those are things that are facts that you don't ever get told, I think you get the airy fairy version.

R: Where do you think you could get these pieces of information that you NEED to make these opinions?

I: A lot of the time there are charities and that which are in the those parts of the world already there are places like OXFAM, I can't remember the name of the place the lady came from at uni, she worked at a particular charity that went to Israel and Palestine... I can't remember off the top of my head, you know there are lots of ummm... charities I suppose, and organisations that are focused on one particular issues, surely they are the best qualified to explain what is the case around that particular issue, I suppose they are the sort of people that you would get the facts from.

R: You mention feeling different about watching the news stories after finding out this information, can you tell me a bit about this?

I: Ummm... I think you definitely take a lot of what is being said with a pinch of salt, especially I don't like news that is.... ummm... very one sided or feels very one sided. I don't believe any story has just one side.

R: Do you have any examples of a story you think was very one sided in its coverage?

I: Ummm... I suppose maybe benefits and things like that I suppose?

R: Can you explain?

I: When they said these are the benefits, this is what the benefits system is going to look like. They attempt to tell you how that is going to affect people but they pick the people who take the most benefits in the worst, technically the worst off but maybe not quite as much and then the people who earn thousands and thousands and that is not where the largest amount of society sits. They all sit roughly in the middle some at the top end of the middle or the high end of the middle, do you see what I mean, it is a moving scale... and I think that they report the top and the botttom and they are going to struggle, they are losing this amount of money and you know the upper middle class are going to have this effect and this tax but what about Joe Bloggs in the middle? what about the person, you know who has two kids that go to school and go to university and all the rest of it and they just about

afford it but they are not better off once they have been and you think what about those people. Who ever puts anything in for those people especially when you might fall in that group, you kinda think I don't want to watch this because it is not to do with me and you are almost supposed to feel sympathetic to the ones at the bottom and the ones at the top are meant to feel bad and I don't know... I don't think it reported anything particularly helpful almost.

R: Can you tell me about your engagement with politics overall?

I: I would like to say... that I... I am educated enough to understand it, but not interested enough to actively seek it out. I believe if it was made more popular and a little more easily accessible I might participate more. The thing with me is if I can see that my point of view has changed something I will always participate if I feel like I vote and my party doesn't get in and nothing happens and nobody talks about what happened and nobody says what happens it almost seems like a waste of time, if I voted on something smaller you know, like a local councillor or should we build this or should we build that, I might actually see that they are uilding that now I have had a say in that or you go to... a good example I suppose is that near Brize Norton they want to build house now... if they asked everybody including people who lived in Brize and said you have to vote on that whether you thought we needed it not or whether house prices around here were alright or not then you know, you might feel that it is something that actually happens in your life, whereas sometimes politics in general appears to be such a ginormous thing that only happens in London, that you kind of feel distanced from it I suppose.

R: Can you tell me how you understand politics?

I: I think politics is democracy I suppose and that everyboides point of view counts as much as the next persons I think we all equally add something into society to make it better and we give up a lot of the other stuff that we might want to have, freedoms and stuff that we might want to have in exchange for security and a little bit of you know, a little bit of input in what society does.

R: Where do organisations like Occupy or online petition groups fall into democracy?

I: I think they are... I think politics and democracy appears to be in a big building and they occasionally send out these little petition forms for you to sign, which then get sent up there and they have a discussion about whether they want to listen to it or not. It is kind of what it feels like. I think if it was something to do with your close area and you can actually see it happen then it would be more useful. But I do think personally on a larger scale there is no way that you can take into consideration all the opinions of all of those people, it is just not possible. i think it does encourage them to to debate it but it doesn't make them decide what you want them to decide, it is almost like a starting point... you start a petition saying they are talking a load of rubbish so they go have a little chat and decide whether they think it is rubbish or not and continue if they disagree.

R: You do you feel you have anything iimportant to contribute to politics?



I: I think everybody does, I think everybody's point of view, because like I said before you have given up something to be part of that democracy so you are as important a member as the prime minister is technically, because everyone should have their point of view if they want to have it... and I think it should be something that you should be able to listen to and have it as a contributing factor. I think people do have something to contribute.

R: Do you feel that the government wants you involved in politics as a young person?

I: Not especially, me as a young person no...

R: Why is that?

I: Because they make it all so... complicated and complex and you know, how many people in the government are even ten years close to me, they are all 30-40-50 years my senior they know nothing about me and what I need, the university fees was a very prime example, how many of those people who were discussing whether those fees should have gone up have been in university in the last 10 years? Pretty much nobody, none of them. They may have kids going but they are all privileged backgrounds and they can pay whatever they like, I don't think they spend enough time or care enough to be particularly interested in how it affects individuals in a normal middle class...

R: Can you elaborate more on your example of student fees?

I: Ummm... I think at the end of the day that all of the people that are in power are interested in being in power I don't think anybody cares about who the next generation that is going to take over that is, because if you think about it in the house of lords and things like that, they are inherited they have done nothing to get there, they have done nothing, they are just old people that apparently know quite a lot about different things, there is a place for those people of course there is but why is it that nobody joins parliament until they are 30/35 why is it there can't be a youth section that interprets what would be best for the next generation, not here and now what is better for the future. They are good at the past they have learnt from the past, nobody seems to be projecting what they think the future will be like, a lot of the time that is what is found on social media, but they don't listen to social media because they don't think it is plausible. It is exactly the same thing as I was saying, how can it be reliable when a lot of it is opinion, the only way that it can transcend into actual social relations is if those people from social media who are able to interact with social media then become actual people. That is what I was saying about the cyber thing, yes social media is really important, it is, and yes young people are really important but until young people take social media and become individuals being part of something intended to make something happen then it is never going to work because cyber only works to a limited degree, like petitions and online petitions that only work to a limited degree, until you have someone who actually stands for it then I don't know if it really makes much difference...

R: What part do you have to play in that transition?

I: I think the more that social media becomes a big part of life, I think the London Riots were a really good example of making it clear the power that the online sphere can have because if you think if we can cause riots from sending a few tweet and a few Facebook messages what happens if we don't agree with the next policy I think that is really important, that is saying we you might not think we are very important and you might not want us there but we can affect what you are doing, they can stop buses, they can you know they can hold petitions and things like that but I think it will get to a point where they will change things.

R: Can you give me an example of when you think social media has had that sort of destabilising effect?

I: Well the London Riots destabilised things and a lot of the petitions to do with the student fees were all organised online and that is where it had all transcended, it is where it went from being cyber to real...

R: Do you feel there is potential for online media to create meaningful change?

I: I think there is, I think like any big party which I do think maybe online could be some sort of social party maybe of some description where the thing for it to work for me to see it would plausibly work to see that people are willing to take their cyuer lives to take them out into the person realm, it needs to be people with enough courage in their convictions to actually get those people that to say right, I believe in what you are saying so why don't you come with me and do this, that is the bit that is the most important is making sure, there is definitely a role for them to play and it is plausible because it has already happened, but I do think that there is a long way to go...

R: Whose responsibility is it to get young people involved in politics?

I: I think it is young people I suppose and I do think it is up to people in government to encourage it because they need to understand their point of view is very important and their point of view has a big influence and they are not going to be there forever and I don't think that is the best way to do it focusing on the here and now. I think there needs to be some part of the government or some organisation or something along that desc4ription that encourages other people... young people it can be older people getting younger people to participate, and I think that is one of the things they need to do...

R: To what extent do you think it is the responsibility of organisations like the government, or news organisations to foster this engagement?

I: I don't think it is up to them, they have their own purpose, like I said they are things filtered into the sphere they have their job, that is already set...

R: And that job is?

I: To give out information, where it is information dictated by the government, whether it is information dictated by their political point of view that is their right and that is actually their position in society to put those things forward, it needs to be somebody separate because you take all three parts of that, the social the you know the news and all those different thinks and you put them all together and then you get the right mix I don't think that if they work with us it would be filtered, it would change it, you want to get the raw form to interact with the two other filtered forms to come up with something in the middle.

### Appendix 5.3: Peter's Transcript

R: Can you tell me how you understand the term social media?

I: Social media uh... is different ways about it obviously there is facebook and ummm... twitter and stuff like that and it is a way people communicate with one another through different sort of medias...

R: So what is characteristic of social media?

I: Ummm... Social media characteristics... ummm... obviously I think it started off being sort of a networking of just... friends really I think it was but it has become more popular ummm... sort of communicating different things from... simple messages to obviously more advertisement and stuff like that now using it a lot more reach different kinds of clientele.

R: What makes social media different from other types of media?

I: It is a... I think it is a bit more electronic um... in the sense of its... its reaching different types of people... in... in a different form in the sense of... like I said through facebook or twitter rather than chatting to people rather than a newspaper where you read it and try and get your understanding of it, it can be portrayed through a video or something like that...

R: Can you tell me about the place social media has in your life at the moment?

I: Social media... um... probably is mainly through facebook i dont really have twitter... I just sort of... it allows me to catch up with friends and family members rather than necessarily something that is going on around in the world... I can connect, with my peers sort of...

R: And how do you use social media in your day to day?

I: Ummm... I normally check it every day maybe even half... even 12 hours i check up on it and see what people have been up to and... what they have been up to really.

R: And how would you characterise you use of social media, what sort of things do you do while on there?

I: Ummm... well i sort of do it because it keeps me involved with what people are doing... I dont really read newspapers so its a way of finding out other bits of news and stuff ummm... what was the the other question sorry?

R: Why facebook not something like twitter or myspace etc.?

I: Ummm... I have not really explored twitter too much... facebook obviously allows you to view other peoples things obviously with twitter you can to an extent but it is more about their blogging and that I personally like the way facebook is set up in the sense that you have got pictures different aspects of it you have got games on it, the newsfeeds... so its a combination of everything in comparison to say twitter which is just news feeds of someone just blogging...

R: So you like the fact that facebook is a catch-all for multiple media formats?

I: Yeah...

R: Can you tell me specifically what you use social media for?

I: Well [the people he speaks to] are not always there... they're obviously... for instance I went to America to do my flying thing out there I was able to share my experiences out there but I wouldn't have been able to do face to face being 5000miles away, i am able to to do instanaeously rather than waiting til a month later when I came back to share my experience of what I did and stuff. Thats what it allows... to upload photos and stuff like that.

R: Do you feel everyone else uses social media in the same way?

I: Some people do, other people use it in different ways... than the way I do but I would have thought 75% of people probably would have used it in a similar way to the way I use it.

R: How do you think the people using social media differently to you, utilise the medium?

I: Ummm... I think they probably... businesses would use it as an opportunity to reach a certain clientele, young people... to advertise whatever they have done. Ummm... bnecause they are on it some much in that sense. It is also providing some other information as well I know on my friends facebook they get a lot of posts of jobs and stuff like that now whereas it never used to be like that but it keeps you more in connection with different things.

R: You mentioned on twitter that it focuses on blogs can you go into more detail on that, what is different about twitter?

I: Yeah... well as I have said i have not really used twitter I have just seen it when it has been on the news, for instance... some politicians been quoted as saying this and people are slagging it off stuff like that. which I suppose facebook can be like that, but from what I gather you can't really delete what you have sent out as such... but whether that is true or not I don't know, I don't use it... but once it is sent on twitter thats it... whereas on facebook you can only show it to friend or to public where twitter goes out to everyone to has you liked or followed.

R: Do you feel that sort of accountability is a good thing?

I: Being able to ummm... if it is used in the right way then it is a good thing...

R: What is the right way?

I: Like it shouldn't really be used for ummm... hatred and sort of nasty stuff it should be more of... because its a social thing it should be a more friendly thing showing positive things rather than negative things in the world, For instance... obviously there is this [Town Name] spotted thing, which is from what I gather is providing a support network for the people that live there and want to portray good things but you see on there that people are posting ummm... pictures of how people park their cars incorrectly, we had a case where the leisure centre that I work at, where someone had taken a picture of one of our lifeguards who looked like they were falling asleep and moaning that this is really

unprofessional when obviously the actual particular group was supposed to be promoting [Town Name] and bits about it rather than the negative things.

R: Do you think there is potential for negative representation on sites such as twitter?

I: Yes... I think facebook can be negative as well I don't think it is never not going to be all positive.

R: Can you tell me about an experience you have had on social media during a major event?

I: Ummm. obviously the world cup that happened, a lot of my friends watch the football and that you see specific posts on certain matches, ummm... the results and stuff like that, some people played well some other people didn't play well.... and they were airing their views sometimes clearly on their some more than others... but yeah it is used for events and big events. You see people talking about X Factor or Strictly Come Dancing they all said it have gone they like to air their view via social media.

R: What contribution do you feel facebook has to your understanding of the event as it happens?

I: They get sort of... the publics... sort of opinion on that event that has happened and usually it is after the event rather than during. Ummm...It doesn't necessarily impact the event itself but I suppose for the individual it feels like they are giving out their frustration or that they are pleased with the result.

R: Did you get involved with discussing the world cup?

I: I didn't no...

R: Are there any instances or events that you have gotten involved with?

I: Ummm... I can't really remember one actually, the world cup would have been good if I had, I got involved to a degree with the olympics... I think it was when Jessica Ennis the heptathletic that did really well, ummm... sort of posted up on facebook in a message "oh we are doing well in this olympics" I think it was.

R: Do you think your involvement enhanced or detracted from the event for you?

I: It didn't necessarily enhance it it just gave me. I suppose gave me a bit more pride being Britain... British. Sayin we are doing well aren't we, showing that I am proud of being British to my friends and family.

R: Can you tell me about how accurate you feel the coverage of these events are on social media?

I: I don't think they are accurate...

R: Why not?

I: It depends what the source is for posting it on social media...

R: What makes a good source?

I: A source coming from the genuine original organisers, putting something on facebook that being something you can probably rely on being truthful, ummm... rather than someone say a friend posting, saying... i don't know... such and such has played really rubbish, when if they were at the game

watching it, it might be actual and truthful, they could be taking on someone else's word and being negative.

R: How do you feel about the notion of social media as a news platform?

I: Ummm... the news platform... is obviously a good aspect within social media.

R: How much do you make use of that aspect of social media?

I: Ummm... well there is certain, obviously I get a load of news bits as a pilot interested in aviation. I will always look at those as they can be quite handy because if something comes up saying job opportunities here or some I don't know... some terminals opened up somewhere else. Then there is a catalyst of job opportunities of things that I might be interested in doing, ummm... some news things sort of flick in and get rid of it straight away I think it is a positive thing.

R: How would you characterise the type of news that is covered on social media?

I: Ummm... I would say a lot of stories on... sort of... there is a lot on politics... sort of war and other stuff like that, they come up quite a bit. There is a lot to do with Afghanistan and Iraq and stuff like that. Ummm... but that is main because a lot of my friends have links to the RAF and the army and stuff like that. You see they have a lot of BBC news and stuff like that on the so it does tend to pop up quite a bit.

R: Do you feel that this is reliable coverage?

I: I think you always have to take it with a pinch of salt ummm... yes you have got to try and delve deeper into what is the actual source and where it is actually coming from but obviously it might not always be factual and it might not be true but unfortunately that is the way the world is. It is not always...

R: Can you tell me about delving deeper in these sources?

I: It is like if you... for instance if you have a friend who posted say ummm... about a politician that has done this, I dunno... for instance say there was a sex scandal or something like that, just them saying it... just one of your friends saying this person has done it doesn't necessarily mean it is truthful obviously there is the likes of BBC news and Sky that probably would gather more evidence but you wouldn't know if it were completely true without actually asking the person. Ummm... so you have to take the media and friends post as a pinch of salt rather knowing whether...

R: How would you personally go about validating these sources?

I: Well... myself... would probably have to somehow... well I personally would look at the news and hope that the news would give me... some reassurance that they are actually doing it correctly and then obviously the investigations of that politician are being investigated and the report that is generated doesn't speak to the individual directly about it, but obviously that would be the quickest and

easiest way of finding out whether it was true or not. The politicians report on it would probably be the most reliable source on it.

R: How does social media rank in relation to other media as a source of news information for you personally?

I: Ummm... It is definitely up in the top 5 I would have said... between social media and television as the main source of information, I tend not to normally read newspapers but...

R: Why not newspapers?

I: Ummm... it is because I don't really by them to be honest, everything is online now, social media it is already there online, television is already just there... I suppose it is a cultural thing.

R: How do you feel about the online presence of newspapers?

I: Ummm... I don't really use them, it is probably because I don't really have the time to sit and read the whole newspaper, I think it is more social media like facebook. You are just flicking through 10/12 posts then you put it down and go do something else whereas with a newspaper you would be there for an hour or so reading and it is just a time aspect.

R: Can you tell me how you access information about current events you are interested in?

I: Ummm... A lot of it I will go online obviously I will go into a search engine and type in for instance olympics, I would have typed in the olympic games, if it was something specific like the diving I would look at the diving page on there, ummm... and then go use the internet most, probably speak to friends about if they have heard anything or stuff like that...

R: You have mentioned television as being culturally the place for information do you make use of that?

I: I think television is a secondary thing... sometimes television does provide some of the information ummm... but if it something like a future event it is not always, it is not portrayed on the television, the information is not always there, they have their own website.

R: Take a story you are interested in can you describe for me the steps you would go through to find out about it as it happens?

I: If it is something like the scottish referendum, I did actually watch quite a lot of that on Sky and on the BBC and stuff like that, and it is quite good to hear from different aspects of different organisations you have got sky and you have got the BBC and they have their own different views on politicians and the way it should go and it is quite interesting to hear about through the television, the way their views are and stuff ummm... on why they wanted to go away from being a part of Britain, the television was obviously a good way of finding it out straight away rather than waiting til the next day for the newspaper.

R: Do you feel they do a good job reporting on these sorts of stories?



I: Television is a lot to do with politics and they do a lot of breaking news, if there are major incidents and stuff like that. They probably do not do enough on local events and local issues. They have a small section within the news, but I suppose if you keep it local you never know what is happening outside. Which is why it is always good to have the bigger picture.

R: Do you feel there should be more local news then?

I: Yes there should be more...

R: Why is that?

I: I think they focus on too much of what is happening in London and not is what is happening in your local area that you could get involved in. whereas in half an hour span of the news you see there is 20mins or so on politics and things happening around the world which is great to know about but then you only get 10 mins about what is happening in your region and not enough on what is going on that you can help with change...

R: Are these things you would like to get involved with then?

I: If I was more aware yes I probably would?

R: What sort of role do you feel news organisations play with regards to politics?

I: They are... well they should give as much information as possible in the sense from different aspects of the parties and not just one. They shouldn't be biased... with any of it it should be a democratic sort of election and ummm... and everyone should have a free vote and understand why... you should be able to get that information from different forms of media be it television, social media, newspapers or whatnot, and they have a key role in providing that?

R: Do you think the information they provide is without bias?

I: Ummm... I think sometimes they try and sway it a little bit. I know on television each party has their own presentation that they can sort of give and obviously now they can do debates on the T.V. giving everyone the opportunity but they don't have every single party there at that sort of presentation or whatever you want to call it even where they discuss certain points they may only have the three major parties rather than the 4 or 5 there are now maybe not including UKIP or the Green party, it is just lib dem, labour and conservation there. They are not quite getting there but it is better than it has been for many many years.

R: Can you tell me more about an experience, where you think a news organisation has attempted to sway coverage in a particular direction?

I: Ummm... I think it is when it is to do with celebrities and stuff thta they do try and sway certain points of view, at the time of what it is i might be reviewing a newspaper in the evening and they have sort of chats about stuff, they go with the headline and they try and really say yeah no that person is

definitely wrong ummm... They don't just do it with celebrities but they do it with politicians and stuff like that, the principle they are getting at is being mixed up with what they are actually saying.

R: Can you give me an example of when this might have been really obvious?

I: Ummm... I think obviously ummm... I think it was when, George Osborne was saying for instance, obviously they had been saying we have been cutting the budget... the deficit sorry... and... then they were saying I think it was. YOU can see that they had obviously reduced it, but people aren't in jobs still and people are saying he is not doing a good job, ummm... but obviously he is reducing the deficit that had been created in the first place ummm... which was obviously the main goal they were saying he hadn't done what he was going to do but he had, also it is a long process.

R: How did it feel being exposed to that sort of bias?

I: Ummm... Like I said I always take news things especially politicians with a pinch of salt. ummm...

R: Can you elaborate on what "a pinch of salt" means to you personally?

I: It is sort of... a pinch of salt is ummm... personally it means to me, sort of taking on board what they are saying, but definitely not saying I am going to do this thing right now ummm... I am definitely for it. Obviously I will process it then sort of think eh... that is quite a good idea but also you could also think is there someone else on top of that saying it is not a good idea and why it is not, so it is just just a... not a brainstorm but a thing to kind of start conversation and start you thinking about the idea of what they have discussed?

R: Do you feel you get the information you need from these organisations despite the bias?

I: I get some information from it...

R: But is it enough to make an informed decision?

I: Ummm... obviously whenever it comes round to voting and things like that I do try and watch the party broadcasts and stuff like that because they have their own, they make it themselves ummm... and the obviously from each one you can then decide on who you want to go for I suppose... I can then sort of get some sort of gut feeling of who I would quite like to vote for through those sort of different bits?

R: Can you tell me about a significant event you saw reported in the news?

I: Ummm... there was obviously the day of Glasgow... the bin lorry had gone down the street and obviously careened into, I think it was a shop it was obviously on breaking news on pretty much every news channel, I am sure there are tons of bin lorries and cars that have accidents I don't why this one particularly was on the news I think it was because they had killed 6 people and it was around Christmas time, but I couldn't understand why it was being shown because obviously bin lorries have accidents every day you kind of think why?

R: Why do you think this particular story was chosen?

I: I think it was because it was in Glasgow, it was in a major shopping district and it was christmas time. I think it was because they weren't sure why it happened I suppose if it had happened on a motorway then you could understand because there are lots of cars but going slowly down the street I spose is why it has happened?

R: You mentioned Glasgow as a potential reason for the coverage what makes you say that?

I: Ummm... I don't know why it is important I think it was just a major even that had happened that maybe people, miught not have been aware of if it hadn't been broadcast, I suppose they wanted to show... maybe I don't know... the time of the year making people think about... loved ones and family I suppose...

R: Can you tell me about your own personal engagement in politics?

I: Ummm... my own personal... I dont really have much to do with it apart from just voting when it comes round to the general elections and sort of elections in may.

R: Can you characterise you experiences of voting in the past?

I: Ummm... obviously like I said I will try and watch the broadcasts and videos to see what is happening and obviously... you can sort of see from local councils on what they are trying to achieve... apart from that I don't really go in depth. I don't mind politics and stuff like that. I like to vote just to sort of say I have had my say. Ummm...

R: Can you tell me more about what mean when you say making sure "I have had my say"?

I: Ummm... well i always feel that if I don't vote I can't complain about something that has happened, whereas if I have had my vote and I dont agree with what they are trying to achieve I feel like I can argue... well not argue my case but I can understand what they are trying to achieve and say no I don't believe in that. If I haven't voted then I can't really say yes or no to either.

R: Are there any ways you could get involved in politics that wasn't necessarily voting?

I: Ummm... I am sure there I just can't really think of anything at the moment. Probably getting involved in sort of local projects or something like that maybe... That might change different things that don't need politicians to do it...

R: Tell me about the idea of politics online, is that something you engage with?

I: I don't think I get involved with it but I read peoples views on it and obviously then you can sort of... you can be swayed by reading some of them because sometimes they can be negative about some politicians but some can be positive. Obviously they are handy... to find out certain bits of information...

R: Do you feel like you have something valuable to contribute to politics?

I: I think everyone has... even myself to sort of help with the community you are, i think probably more on a local level rather than a national level...

R: Why is that the case?

I: If you do it at a local level it is impacting you and the people around you and I know that national would effectively do that ummm... but if you focus on local issues then... your impacting on whatever is in your community at that time, but the national things are likely to affect you in say 5 years time and more for the long run.

R: So like the immediacy of local area politics?

I: Yes

R: Are there any examples of local politics you have gotten involved with?

I: Ummm... well it is not necessarily sort of politician... or political way I obviously work at the leisure centre we obviously run the local council facility for them and we try and do different projects for different people ummm... we do a disability inclusion one... something the council want is to really push to sort of provide different sporting and leisure facilities for them and we are trying to deliver, the company I work with and help them... achieve some tragets that they are trying to achieve.

R: Do you feel the government is interested in what young people have to say?

I: Ummm... I thknk they try to perceive that they are listening, I think they still have their own set mind about how they want to see things and that they want to try and get everyone on board ummm... but then you could almost argue do they listen to OAPs or anyone to a certain aspect, it depends on how you see it.

R: More importantly do you think the government wants you invlved in politics?

I: I think they do, I think they more want your part in it when it is building up to their local election or something like that they really try and engage with the young people and the people who will inherit it...

R: Why do you think that might be the case?

I: I think it is becuase young people don't vote as much as say the older people who have always voted and are almost a guaranteed vote, as they call it...

R: What makes you think that young people don't vote?

I: Ummm... I think it is becuase they are busy and don't necessarily understand politics... as much as someone who is slightly older... and has obviously gone through loads of politician votes... and not necessarily worried about who is elected as much as the older generation do.

R: How do you feel about your current representation in politics as a young person?

I: Ummm... Well I must admit there doesn't seem to be very many young politicians.

R: Why do you think that is the case?

I: Ummm... I think it is... it takes alot to get into politici... politics ummm... I think it is... I don't know I think they probably see it as the odler gentleman or older lady has more experience of... in their community, in their region that they can help them more than someone who is say younger.

R: Why is older better in that sense?

I: Ummm... I think it is because... I think it is just a bit of a perception they have more knowledge... or that they have more time to be elected unless you choose it as a career.

R: To what extent do you feel you personally can make a difference to how the country is run?

I: Ummm... I think trying to get involved in local... sort of... things that the council are setting up to try and provide things for different people which would then help people in need or...

R: Do you feel that you are limited to local politics?

I: You can certainly get involved with some national things depending on what it is... if it is like for instance a referendum or whether we are in or out of Europe obviously the vote comes to everyone and everyone should have their say in it and not just the local scale. There are certainly things that should be done nationally that I would get involved in but does depend on whether it is a national thing and about how the information is provided to you... in getting involved.

R: Can you tell me about your personally experience of politics online?

I: Ummm... online poiltics... the only bit get from that is obviously maybe watching ummm... news clips online on certain apps and stuff like that. Like news apps which is obviously really... the only part of... I wouldn't really do too much online.

R: What about an online petition?

I: I have actually never done an online petition.

R: Why not?

I: Ummm... first of all I have never been asked to do one but secondly I probably... that would be the main reason.

R: If you were asked?

I: If I were to get involved I would like to know more about why, what it is and why they are petitioning on it and if I felt it was a good cause and it would benefit people then yes I would.

R: Do you think online participation is different from other types of politics?

I: Ummm... probably not no... it is is a different form of sort of... doing it in the past they would probably do petitions sort of rallying round getting people to write names on papers, I suppose it is a bit more... it can spread a bit quicker than somebody just driving it round communities... say putting it on social media you could... there was obviously somebody who died in [town name] where 7000 people had said how sad it was and how they are going to fundraise thing to get a memorial whereas

if you did that locally you might only get 100 people or so, whereas the impact is a lot greater online because people are a lot more connected.

R: Is there a difference between online and offline engagement?

I: ... Ummm... I think there is a difference ummm... well... I suppose if thousands of people online are saying lets do it you need somebody to drive it but if you are doing it offline you already have somebody to drive it to start with... I think well its...having it online saying thousands of people on there people are going to notice a bit more that a couple of hundred people so the impact would be a bit more I suppose.

R: Does that interest translate into actual action?

I: Yes I do with this death, 7/8000 people had commented or done something about it and the school at the time, a lot of people wanted to share their respects allowed a plot in their sort of grounds to plant a tree and that and if it were offline and only 100 people did they might not have said yes you can have it and I suppose then for the school it is a way to say yes we are supporting it aswell. Then you might not have heard about it offline...

R: Is online participation always good?

I: Groups like Occupy certainly did impact it a little bit, the riots probably showed that it might cause offence to certain types of people. Could they have done it differently? yeah they could have done.

R: Whose responsibility is it to get people involved with politics?

I: Really it should be the politicians...

R: In what way?

I: I suppose they should be going to the communities they represent and saying... what do you want to see different? How should we change it to make it better , not necessarily negative. they should be driving it and getting on board, saying this is how our community wants it for all local and national things not necessarily ummm... assuming this is what people want...

R: What is the role of news of news organisations in this?

I: Their role is sort of... to display different forms of information that different parties, what their views are on certain things so that they are able to...

R: Can you tell me how they should go about doing that?

I: Ummm... obviously through debates ummm... they are able to show different parties reactions to certain questions, obviously they can do online sort of, not petitions as such but voting on certain things so the public can argue the case online sort of through T.V. and voting on certain questions and that. People to see how peoples view is before a general election, obviously they do a lot of sample voting and stuff like that.

#### **Appendix 5.4: Teresa's Transcript**

R: Can you tell me how you understand the term social media?

I: Umm... Social media is a I would say is a platform, an online platform, that people can use to interact with, with one another, via the internet.

R: Specifically the internet?

I: I would say... I would say so... Umm... I cant think of any sort of potential examples of social media that arent online offhand, but that might just be because the term has been so, has now become sort of one with online social media. Not that I can think of at the minute.

R: Is social media different from other types of media?

I: Yes, umm... I would say mainstream media is, is more of a one way street in terms of... um... in terms of media as it were, umm... I would see regular media as things like newspapers, tv, radio, anywhere where media presented to you, and there is less of an intereaction with it, obviously you can interact with it, and there is an interaction with it, but online social media, its a platform in a way that you can interact with the original provider of that media.

R: So what characterises social media specifically?

I: I would say it is anything that allows you to create any sort of account... or provide, not necessarily personal information about yourself, I would say with things like Facebook and Twitter you obviously have to provide personal information about yourself, in order to be able to sort of interact and get involved with, but it's something where you have to... well you have to go to the effort to create some kind of personal, personal account, in order to be able to discuss the media that you are wanting to get involved with.

R: Are there other social types of media that aren't things like Facebook or Twitter?

I: Yes. Absolutely. Umm, I mean I use, obviously you have, I would say, any newspaper online forum, say for example, it's not a great example, but I would say the Daily Mail's website, that sort of thing, you can create an account and get involved with media in that sense, there's also online platforms, such as Reddit, that I get involved with quite regularly that provides, umm... that shares media between users, rather than providing it firsthand.

R: Could you tell me about the differences between something like Facebook and Reddit?

I: I would say, Facebook is a lot more personal. People use Facebook, people create Facebook as a personal profile, umm... so you have your own name, you have your information, you have your pictures, where you work, where you went to school, all of your likes and interests and things on there, whereas, and its kind of the same with Twitter, to a certain extent where it is personal, whereas things like Reddit, I find, are all you need for Reddit is a username and a password, so it is a lot more

anonymous, but there is always a history of the things that you have posted, so over time, you can, end up creating your own personal profile to yourself, but there is nothing linking it to you specifically.

R: Can you tel me what place social media has in your life at the moment?

I: I say it plays quite a big role, in terms of the job I do, Im largely self employed, I work largely from home, umm, and so I spend a significant amount of my time, on, on my own, at home, on social media, either, discussing things, with friends, having a catch up, talking, talking to other people, I have a lot of friends that don't live anywhere near me that I don't, that I dont see on a regular basis, its a great way for me to connect with people that I don't, that I don't see frequently and see what they are up to, and also quite frankly to "stalk" people that I haven't spoken to in a long time, also... in the sense that it allows me to, promote my business, I can discuss things like that, and I have a page for my own business, and to keep up with current events, in terms of Facebook, I check Facebook daily, and, they have integrated the new, way where it shows you the trending stories like Twitter does now, and it has that and you can click on that, and quite often you can see if there is a major event or something going on, that is on there. I also use Reddit quite a lot for that, as well, I spend... a lot of procrastination time on Reddit, but its also a good way of keeping up to date with news events as well, obviously because there are subreddits there that, that include the news, and serious posts, rather than sort of silly procrastination posts.

R: So what sort of social media do you use?

I: I... primarily I use Facebook and Reddit, but I do have a Twitter account as well. Umm... I go on and off it, Twitter is one of those, that I go on, when I need it. It is something I used to use a lot more regularly than I do now, and in fact I logged back onto it a couple of days ago to complain at a company, umm... I... wasn't getting any response from a company that was, it was a delivery company, I hadn't received my package and I went to complain to them, and the only way I got a response from them, rather than their online forms, was through... was through social media. It was the only way I managed to get, to get a response and I went onto Twitter with the intention of tweeting about my bad experience, and hoping other people would retweet that, and that would generate some, umm... some interest from, from that company.

R: Why Twitter and not Facebook?

I: I went on Facebook as well. My initial post was, through Facebook, I sent them a direct message and posted on my wall, whereas on Twitter... I find that with Facebook it, it is something that you are posting to your friends, and it is just something that is your, social circle, whereas Twitter, with the ability to retweet, and you can share things on Facebook but it doesn't ever generate quite the same momentum as tweets do, tweets are very short, easy posts, and its quite easy to generate momentum, its quite easy to trend on Twitter as well, because of the, you can select your, the trending you can



select it to be worldwide, or just from your country and things like that so it's a lot easier, umm... and a lot quicker to generate that sort of momentum in terms of...

R: What is it about Twitter that allows you to generate that momentum, beyond for example, Facebook?

I: I think the way that it is, the way it was set up, it was set up I think, in order to create short, quick, quick posts, rather than, longer messages or videos, and you can share pictures and videos and things like that but they always require an extra click, so the large percentage of posts on Twitter I find are quite quick, short messages, umm... and its very easy when youre flicking through that to read a lot more than if you were on Faceboo, and therefore you see a lot more on Twitter, its easy to follow people on Twitter as well, you dont have to just follow people you know on Twitter, they don't have to approve, your following, you can change the setting on there, but it is easier, to follow a large number of people, including celebrities and politicians and well known politicians as well as just unknown people that are friends or people that you find interesting, but its easier to... because of how short it is, and because of the way its presented to you is just that, whereas Facebook has a lot of different, features, whereas Twitter is just that one.

R: What characterises your use of Twitter?

I: I... post on Twitter usually. I used to use it a lot more, and I used to post day to day stuff, in fat I used it a lot more frequently that I used Facebook because the people I lived with used Twitter as well, and it was, it was sort of a nicer medium for a while, and... whereas I went off it and I came back on... because it's, I post on there when, I dont necessarily want to share something with the people that are my friends on Facebook, i just want to say, have a little bit of a rant or say, just want to... moan about something or, post something quickly that i dont necessarily want showing up on my personal facebook profile.

R: Why rant there? What is the purpose of doing it there?

I: Partly to just sort of, get it out of my head, partly because somebody else might find it interesting, umm... and... and there is always that thing that if you post something that is vaguely amusing or, annoying, other people may share in that, and its sort of brings you with other people, that you might not necessarily know, i mean most of the people that do follow me on twitter, its dwindled now a little bit because i dont use it as frequently anymore, but they were people that i didnt know, and so its easier to sort of connect with people, connect with a wider range of people than on Facebook.

R: What did you see happening with your complaint on Twitter?

I: I was hoping that it would, potentially get retweeted, by a few people, and then obviously there is always that hope that it will generate some kind of trending hashtag or other people would want to voice their opinions on the same thing and say yes ive had the same experience, but ultimately i

wanted the company to respond, because obviously it is so public, i know that companies are worried about their online profile, they dont want to be seen showing a bad service, and so complaining about something on a public forum like that rather than just sending a private message, makes it, makes it a lot more public, its sort of like in the olden days, rather than sending a letter, publicly protesting would generate a far better response and its the same with twitter, youre kind of hoping that that company, even if they are a really rubbish company, they want you to see them as good, and they want the public and potential customers to see them as good, so giving a positive response and publicly apologising to myself in this case, would increase their exposure... a lot of twitter conversations have gone very public. One that I can think of was I think there was a man... sharing amusing hashtags with Tesco, or something, there was a big company a few months ago, and everyone laughed and everyone thought it was very funny, and it improved people's opinions of that company, it shows a connection with the public. Umm... and I think thats ultimately what they, what the companies want to try and do, and all i wanted to be honest, was an acknowledgement that they had screwed up, and an offer to do something to mitigate that. Umm... and if I had to do it in a public forum, then so be it, id do it rather than dealing with it privately.

R: Did you get anything from that?

I: I actually received a response to my facebook message that I sent to them privately, but I did also publicly post on their wall, no I didnt post on their wall, they didnt have that feature, but I wrote a facebook post about it, linking their page to it, and they did send me a reply, asking me to... it was my dad who paid for the service... asking him to contact them and to deal with it, whereas he received no reply over 5 days, just emailing them on their online form.

R: Why do you think that would be the case?

I: Well like I said, I think it is because obviously they have... they want their... online profile to be seen, to be seen as positive, they want to remain positive, publicly, but also I think its easier now to check social media for messages and things like that. I mean I deal with this, im in charge of a facebook page, and it's a lot easier to deal with that, rather than dealing with, sort of, online emails, where their not seen as personal, because it is just a name and an email and a message, whereas with social media, most people use it, and so you sort of see the person at the other end as a real person rather than just a name on a form.

R: Was this the first time you've used social media to challenge poor practise?

I: Potentially... umm I may have used it in the past as well, but I can't think of any other examples, I know several people who do do it on a regular basis, they postvery regularly on public forums, on, sorry, companys public forums, complaining about a service, and things like that, so, so other people are doing it regularly, I have probably done it in the past, but I cant quite remember now.

R: So how do you use Facebook? How is it different?

I: Most of the time, day to day, in terms of Facebook I use it as, quite frankly a procrastination tool, I use it to check and see what other people are doing, keeping up with other peoples lives as it were, as I said I have a fair few friends who are, that I dont see on a regular basis, because they either live in a different part of the country to me or they live in a differnt country, or they are just very very busyt, so most of the time, in terms of facebook I use it to... to sort of keep in contact with people, even if im not interacting with them directly, Im reading about what they are doing and things like that. I dont post very frequently, I spend most of my time either reading, or using the messaging function.

R: Why don't you post very regularly?

I: I dont... like.. posting mundanity, mundane things that arent overly... overly interesting. I spend a significant portion of my day doing things relating to my business, umm... and relating to my job, and i just find it dull reading about other peoples jobs, and then trying to sort of self-promote, and I do a little bit, but I am aware of it, becoming annoying... ummm... but also... I dont have sort of a huge amount to post, when I have something interesting to say, that I feel is interesting, that I feel other people would find interesting, I will then post it. Or share something that somebody else has posted.

R: What do you think other people use social media for?

I: There's a few categories in terms of how people use, how people use it. Some people use it as a diary, as a public way of airing their dirty laundry, kind of, moaning, constantly, there's the... the people that are clearly very self involved that like posting, sort of look at how amazing I am kind of, and look at how awesome my life is, sort of posts, which I find very annoying, theres also the types of people that just, that use it as I said, to, discuss... umm... with companies about sort of that service and things like that and complain about current events... but also, it is used primarily as a tool to... I mean I'm talking about Facebook specifically here in terms of those examples there, but its a way of people keeping in contact with each other, it is a social tool, and therefore most of the time people are using it to be social.

R: How do you feel about your time spent on social media?

I: I would say, sort of, 70% of it is completely counterproductive in terms of what I should be doing, most of the time when I am on social media, I should be doing something else, Im doing it because I dont want to go and do my work or I dont want to go out and do the things I need to be doing, the rest of the time I am either... posting about something relating to my business, or the business I control, its my parents business, I control the Facebook page for their business.. umm... also I discuss personal, I mean terms of Reddit, I have discussed personal things, as an anonymous sort of poster, when I, you kind of want a like minded person to talk to, just to work through something, so I think it is about 70% counterproductive, and 30% productivity in terms of helping me in some way.

R: What are the counterproductive things you do on social media?

I: I just sit and read most of the time, I will either, on Facebook. Most of the time when I wake up in the morning, my routine in the morning is to wake up and check facebook and see what has gone on in the past 12 hours or so while ive been asleep... umm... just read... I do it as the most recent stories rather than the top stories and i just flick down and read anything that is interesting, sometimes people have done something interesting or said something interesting, or something funny has happened, or someone has shared a current event or something that I havent been aware of... and then I will check, if I have a bit of downtime, or if Im sitting and not doing very much, I will also flick through Reddit and things like that, and again, it will come up with either pictures of cats and dogs and funny things like that, or it will be something that is educational, as well, ive learnt quite a lot while Ive been on Reddit, because people post interesting things, interesting facts, stories, current events, political events, and things like that and obviously because you can pick and choose what you want to read, i read the things I find interesting or the things I feel I should know and therefore I learn something as well.

R: Can you tell me about an experience that you have had on social media during a major event?

I: I remember while the... a couple of examples spring to mind... when the Malaysia plane went missing, I remember, there were a lot of posts, sort of online... relating to it, and I remember sort of spending quite a significant amount of time reading the things about it, reading what other people were discussing about it, and finding things out in terms of news stories on that, and also when the 2012 olympics was on as well, obviously it being in London, and me being from the UK as well, it was, it was on a lot and everybody was getting very involved, and everybody came together a little bit more than usual on social media, discussing what was happening, discussing the opening ceremony, discussing the various events, discussing sort of the Super Saturday when it happened and things like that, and everyone came together as a community then, which was quite nice, and I was on it quite a lot then, reading about it, and I think posting once or twice posting my views about that.

R: Can you tell me a little bit more about your personal experience during one of those events?

I: Yeah... umm... I like reading other peoples comments, I mean quite a lot of people link to stories either on news websites or on blogs or things like that, and I quite enjoy reading other peoples comments relating to it, obviously the story itself is quite interesting, so I either spend most of my time flicking down into the comments and seeing what other people think. I've usually formulated my own opinion as well by that point, but it is interesting to see what other people are saying about the same thing, so most of the time I spend seeing, how the general public, apart from me are reacting to this, rather than discussing, than going out to the pub and discussing it sort of thing, I use social media to see what the general views are.

R: What about in relation to a specific event, for example Super Saturday?

I: Well it was all very positive, because it was that sort of event, where most of the country sort of came together, and it was nice to see... everybody... umm... banding together, probably more recent example would be the attacks in Paris as well, I didnt know anything about what had happened, and then obviously it... it... took sort of Facebook Twitter and the general internet in general by storm.

R: What was your immediate impression in that case, when you first read about it?

I: Obviously it was a horrible thing that happened, umm... and... most of my impressions were that, obviously everybody was coming together, sort of humanity as it were, or the Western World at least, because that's what I see on Facebook and on Reddit and on, things, were sort of... banding together in unity rather than, clashing against each other in terms of opinions.

R: so you think the coverage of those events was accurate?

I: Im not sure, I mean obviously from what I've read, obviously I dont know personally exactly what has happened, why it has happened, and you dont know the exact reasons, the only reasons I know are the reasons I have read, and so it seems as though it's accurate, and seems as though its relevant, and it seems to be portrayed relatively accurately, but obviously you dont know 100% the full story unless you were there.

R: do you have any experience of any coverage that you saw on social media that you would say wasn't very accurate?

I: Umm... there probably has been... I cant necessarily think of any examples... that sort of spring to mind, that aren't very accurate, the only thing I can think of right now is I remember David Cameron posting something on his sort of official facebook page, a couple of years ago about graduate unemployment and youth unemployment and how its got significantly better while hes been in power and in my experience, obviously I wasnt, I couldnt experience beforehand how it was, but it doesnt seem to have been the case in terms of my generation, the people around me, the types of jobs... he was posting like how its been this great amazing thing hes managed to get all these young people employed, whereas, most of the people around me, a year after I had graduated, were still in part time jobs or in... I say crap jobs, sort of things like still working in retail or working in bars, or shops and things like that that didnt require their education, that they had spent 3/4 years trying to get, and so I didnt find that very accurate, and in fact, I remember myself and a few other people getting annoyed about that, about that post, because it wasnt very accurate, but it was presented in such a convincing way, that its obviously for him to get more of a positive view from, from the public.

R: How do you think other people would have received that information?

I: I think a lot of the people that either, that already support David Cameron would react positively to that, because obviously, they voted for him, and they want to think that was justified, oh look yeah i

voted for him, and look what good its done. Its sort of self... its sort of giving yourself a pat on the back, and the older generation, people that arent experiencing it, would be convinced by that argument, whereas I think people those of us that weren't... that can disagree with that because we are in the generation that he is discussing... probably disagree.

R: Can you tell me how you fel about social media as a news platform?

I: I think it can work quite well... done correctly. I think there is enough of a voice from, from everybody that is on the social media platform in question, to provide sort of the opposing viewpoint, rather than mainstream media, where if you read a newspaper, and youre reading an article on X Y or Z, that says, that presents a story, it will present it in that one way, it may present it reasonably neutrally, but that in't necessarily, obviously then representative of the viewpoints. Obviously if they present the news story in that way you are reading it passively and you have no interaction with that... with the writer or with the source, or with the story in general... its very one way whereas with social media you can generate a two way dialogue, either with the, with the original company that has written it, or the person that has written it, or the people around you, the people that are potentially involved in that situation.

R: What is the value of that two-way dialogue?

I: It can be quite educational, it can be quite persuasive, it's good for the people reading it, in terms of educating and obviously persuding them as well, but I also think its quite good for the people that are presenting the media as well, because they get instant feedback on what they are writing, how they are writing it, how they are presenting it, and their views... and I think that that allows them to move forward more quickly and to learn more quickly in terms of how they should present.

R: With that many voices, is neutrality important?

I: I think it's... I dont necessarily its important as an in... I dont think everybody should necessarily remain neutral, because obviously with the amount of people that are potentially commenting, discussing, this news story, I think you will eventually receive then on that say comment thread, a balanced viewpoint, and then, theres the new people joining that argument will have both views, so I think the original article should potentially present it neutrally in order for people to generate their oinions, but then providing the platform for people to express those opinions then allows for the persuasive aspect.

R: Do you think you get a consensus of opinion after a while?

I: I don't necessarily think you would get a consensus on every single story, I think with things like... obviously the plane that was shot down over Ukraine, the general consensus was obviously that it was a terrible, awful, horrible thing that happened, and thats obviously representative of the opinion of the general public, but when it is something that is contentious and that does present... can encourage

two completely opposing views, I think then it is a good thing to show people that it is contentious and that there are these 2, 3, 4, 10 strong, different views on this one thing.

R: What is your opinion on these opposing views? What do you do when you read these sorts of posts that has those opposing viewpoints?

I: I will always, ill read both sides, and ill try to see both sides, it depends on how those views are presented, if the views from side A are presented quite factually... I mean peoples viewpoints are always going to be presented passionately, but if they are presented unaggressively, but if people's views on side B are presented very persuasively and very aggressively, in a very hostile way, then that is usually quite persuasive towards say side A. but its always interesting to see how, how each side reacts, to see and usually its sort of indicative of which sides argument is better for lack of a better word, because obviously it's, it's not good to be that aggressive and that sort of hostile in terms of sort of presenting your opinions because its just going to be counterproductive.

R: Do these views tend to be quite balanced in terms of the opposing arguments when you see them?

I: A lot of people will jump on a bandwagon, I think, if an argument by the original poster is, is swayed, you will, a lot of the time, a lot of the comments will either be condemning that person, or agreeing with them, but a lot of people wont take the time to agree with something than they will to take the time to disagree with something.

R: Why do you think that is the case?

I: I don't know. It's hard... people don't necessarily want to expend the effort if they agree with something, because they tend to be less impassioned, when they read something that just, that they just agree with, whereas if they disagree with something, its more, probably more motivating to say no I dont agree with that to say here is my voice, because you want to be heard and you want to be represented, whereas if it's already been represented, then you dont necessarily feel that its worth putting, expending the effort, because it can sometimes be quite a lot of effort, because if you are reading a comment on a website, usually you have to create some sort of account to be able to comment, and so expending that effort just to say, yes I agree with this, isnt necessarily worth it if your views are already represented.

R: Are there any instances where you might do that?

I: Ummm... Obviously if you are reading something that is petitioning, ummm... if the original poster is trying to be... is addressing the opposing side and then you would agree with that, with the original poster. You then as well want to get your views heard... if something is being done... if something is publically... sorry if something is not being done... and you have an opposing viewpoint ummm... to that and then the original poster sort of has your point of view... then... agreeing with them can help there cause because they want to be heard, and to be seen as supported if you feel that the posteer

who is posting wants to be supported... then its... more moving then for you to be... there is more of a reward the... for presenting your views...

R: Can you tell me about how you access information on current events?

I: Ummm... most of the time I will rely on... ummm... Facebook or Reddit in order to receive my views... Reddit I tend to use as more of a world... ummm... world events ummm.... because the people that are posting there are posting from all around the world, whereas facebook is more my closer circle of... is my circle of friends and acquaintances and people I personally know therefore... Facebook if there is something going on for example in my home town ummm... I will always see it on Facebook because somebody that I know... talk and friends with on Facebook will have posted in there, whereas major sort of world events I will then see on Reddit... I do very occasionally watch the news but that is a rarity nowadays I ummm... I tend to... I tend to use the internet for finding about current events.

R: Why the internet over television and newspapers?

I: I mean obviously it is easier to get that information as and when you want it, if you have ten minutes or so... say you have a lunch break and you have fifteen minutes to sit down and catch up on events, the information is always there on the internet but with TV it is... harder to access because obviously you need to watching the news at 6 o'clock or 10 o'clock if you are watching on the BBC, yes it is on BBC news 24 but they do cycle the news stories so it is easier to access the news stories you want whenever you want online. I know I am sounding like an advert for BBC news online ummm... but it is true it is easier to read what you want to read when you want to read it... It is more convenient.

R: How important is convenience for accessing that sort of information?

I: I think very... I think in terms of... I think if something is more convenient you are more likely to take advantage of it. I remember when I was younger, I had no idea what was going on in terms of current events and things like that... and I didn't really care because obviously the way TV news and things were presented when I was younger seemed quite ummm... inaccessible ummm... and it didn't seem like it was targeted at a wide range at people... and I say this very broadly that it was targeted at adults ummm... whereas with online media there is such a wide range of... things presented in different ways that it is easier for... for everybody to access that information and so I feel that the kids nowadays it is easier for them to remain involved in terms of current events because there is always going to be a way that it is accessible for them and accesible for me and for my parents and accessible for the oldest generation as well...

R: Are there any disadvantages to this level of accessibility?

I: I think it could come accross as a little condescending if it is presented just for... if a particular news story has been tailored to reach say 10 to 15 year olds it can come accross as quite condescending if you are a little bit older than that and you are mentally able to access the information presented to



older people but then you are not... you can search out the information that is presented in that way you would subscribe to the ummm... sources that are presented to you in the best way for you. So I don't think there is necessarily a huge advantage. It is obviously a lot more work in terms of the people presenting, it is harder to present a unified... view, say for example BBC news wanted to present the... one event, but they wanted it presented in such a way that it was accessible for every generation and they have several platforms in terms of being accessible for different people they have to write it a whole host of different ways. It could potentially muddle... what they are presenting but I think that's a job creation then and that is only going to be a good thing... in terms of everyone being involved in current events...

R: Do you feel they do a good job reporting on the current events you are interested in?

I: I think so... Ummm... they... obviously I search out the sources that I feel... are presented in the best way...and it is probably quite... in the same sense as say the older generation would read a particular newspaper ummm... if they liked the way for example say the guardian wrote news stories but someone else preferred the way the daily mail wrote stories they would choose to read that newspaper over the other and I think this is just a wider variety online and it is easier to pick your preferred presentation of... of news stories it is also easier to bookmark things and come back to them later when it is more convenient for you...

R: Can you tell me what you think the role of news organisations is with regards to politics?

I: I think they sort of... mitigate the... the propaganda and I use that term very loosely... that politicians and political parties put forward obviously. Politicians want to be incredibly persuasive in their arguments because they want you to vote for them and they want you to support them and they want to be able to act out the... the ummm... what's the word... the... the things they want to implement, policies... policies that's the word. The policies that they want and I think media does a lot to keep that, firstly keep that in check, keep them from getting too big for their boots as it were ummm... keep them from... presenting false information, catch them out on that sort of thing but also it's a good way... for... some news outlets and for some media organisations to present... all of the... all of the information in a way that allows you to make your decision in relation to which party you want to support or formulate your own views on an event that is occurring that different political parties have differing views on...

R: Do they do a good job in this?

I: They do and they don't, certain news organisations do, certain ones don't uhhh... they sort of keep each other in check it is not just political parties it works out as a balance it is like, it's more of an online community I think as well in terms of everybody keeps each other... from getting to... from going in one particular direction too much and damaging... ummm x y or z damaging public opinion, being too

persuasive, outwardly lying and things like that and most of the time they do do a good job because it is so easy to see the repercussions online, people will straight away comment if they think the news on... and call out news organisations if they think they are doing something wrong in some way.

R: Do you think you always get the information you need to make an informed decision like you say?

I: I think if you search it out then yes, If you are reading one story on one website then you are not going to get all the information but if you are interested enough in that story to be able to search out more about it... then you will, then you will find more and you will then get presented with all the opinions if you want to take the time to find them. but if you are only reading one story or one opinion then you are not going to get everything, it depends on how you as a reader try to get that information.

R: How many people do you think do seek out the information like this?

I: I mean in terms of my sort of circle of people that I know and people that I associate with ummm... they are the types of people that will search out several views... and search out more ummm... and will search out there are a lot of very ignorant people that will read one story and take that as the gospel and not go and search it out... and you see people being ummm... being brought up on the fact on websites and in comments and things like that.

R: Do news organisations report news differently to social media?

I: Uh.. yes I think so... newspapers and TV type information is presented in a much more professional manner obviously it has changed nowadays I remember...being younger and it was always a newscaster with a very proper sort of British accent ummm... proper pronunciation proper posture sitting behind a desk with papers in front of them reading the stories in a very professional manner, and they do retain that professionalism but they are trying to be more... ummm... engaged with the public and they have come away from that very proper... ummm... sort of... view of things and they do sort of come out from behind the desk now and it is sort of quite obvious in the way they are doing that now but online media is a lot more relaxed version of that it has always been quite the realms of bloggers and independent persons and the layman sort of view of things and any media organisation has to fit in with the rest of the crowd in order to get involved there effectively. I think there is a lot of pressure for them to be like everybody else, ummm... and that is potentially quite a good thing because it presents the... it presents the stories in a much more accessible manner.

R: Do you think you can trust what these organisations say with regards to news stories?

I: I think so... I will always trust a BBC news story over an online article I have read straight away because they always remain quite neutral on it ummm... they present to you the facts rather than opinions and I think they are quite trustworthy in how they present things but I do also like ummm... it is also nice to be able to read ones that are slightly more persuasive as well...

R: Why is that?

I: Because it is nice to see... them as human aswell ummm... it can... occasionally come across a bit robotic in the way the present news media, it is obviously a very positive thing because they want you to formulate your own opinion but it is also nice to see how other people have actually reacted to the events they are covering and it is nice to see other peoples views. I am always quite interested to see how other peoples view or see things you can be quite blind in your own opinions ummm... so for... in terms of whether... the new, when I was studying and Michael Gove was the education secretary and I was studying to be a teacher... I despised him because of what he was doing but it was also nice to see people who have that opposing viewpoint to keep you in check as well... to think why does that person have that opinion... and why... why are they thinking like that, so by accessing more opinionated views on things can also be very educational aswell in terms of helping you, not necessarily sway your point but empathise.

R: Can you tell me a little bit about your engagement with politics?

I: Ummm... I don't... engage... very much with politics ummm... because I don't... I do vote and I have voted in the general elections I don't vote in the local elections... but... it can be quite a negative experience... obviously I did vote for the lib dems in the last election and they have screwed up in terms of what they promised and what they did and obviously I am having to have a rethink about my political views and things like that so I don't necessarily engage with politics but I am always quite willing to have a discussion about politics if it comes up on social media or in the pub, or with friends or at work, or things like that, or with students I teach, because it comes up. So being educated enough to be able to have that discussion is quite important otherwise you just come across as ignorant.

R: Is politics restricted to general and local elections?

I: No ummm... I was obviously just sort of giving a quite general, general example they tend to be the sort of in roads... in terms of... in being involved with politics obviously you can get involved in more local matters and policies and things like that ummm... and it is quite... i think it is quite hard to make a difference because there are soo many... people potentially getting involved in something your personal view tends to get a bit lost in the crowd and politicians don't necessarily listen to you so it is hard to make a difference.

R: Despite that do you have anything important to contribute to politics?

I: Everybodys view is important and everbodys.. everybodys life and the way they... deal... with... those policies is very important so I think if something isn't working for you or you very strongly believe in something it is important to put your view across be it on petitions or social media or ummm... through writing letters or any other sort of means, going down to your local council and discussing matters it is quite... it should be quite important, people can be very lazy and I personally am very lazy in terms of getting involved ummm... but if... my view is if no one got involved with politics then... we

would have a very apathetic society that wouldn't... we wouldn't have any politicians if nobody wanted to get involved with politics no one would be passionate enough to want to be a politician to want to get involved and... nobody would vote and therefore government and whole system would break down in that extreme. Ummm... but also if everyone got involved it would also create a bit of chaos as well

R: How well represented do you feel by the government as a younger demographic?

I: Very poorly, at the minute ummm... especially with what happened with the lib dems in the last election a lot of young people a lot of people my age voted for the lib dems ummm... because they promised to lower university fees and make education, well to make life easier for young people because they acknowledged it can be quite hard as a younger person in terms of employability and education but they sort of... with the hung parliament they went completely back on their word to get a foot hold in... in the government and therefore we were very misrepresented ummm... in this current sort of ummm... in the current government

R: Do you feel you can trust the government to rectify those issues?

I: I think so, ummm... I mean obviously... the mistakes of one party doesn't necessarily reflect the... how every party or every person will react obviously Nick Clegg acted in a specific way it doesn't necessarily mean that all the other party leaders or even the cabinet members will act in the same way... and so I think... so I don't think it is necessarily I have been burnt once I am not going to try again situation you keep trying until something works and I think it is naive of people to think that, by not getting involved again is going to help the situation ummm... everybody just needs to find... the view... the one sort of trustworthy member of... sort of... parliament and government and party that will act on their views anwhether that is either by trying to read and find somebody that does seem more trustworthy. Obviously if they fail again we fail again but you can't just stop trying you try until you succeed and you keep trying until things work. You don't go oh this didn't work this one time I just going to give up and let them do whatever they want because that is very childish.

R: To what extent do you think you can make a difference in how the country is run?

I: Individually not a great deal ummm... but as a community and as a crowd you can make quite a big difference. I mean I am one sort of 25 year old that probably can't make a huge difference on my own but by rallying with the rest of... just the 25 year old or everyone aged 18-25 or everybody that has done a psychology degree at Canterbury University as a community you can make a lot more a difference but you need everybody to feel that and to get involved to be able to do that.

R: Do you feel that the government wants you involved in politics as an 18-25 year old?

I: I think so, obviously uh... we are... I mean obviously we are just one age bracket out of uh I don't know. You probably have 18-25, 25-35 sort of 6 or 7 different age bracket so we are a sixth of the

population so I think it is quite important to not alienate one bracket for the sake of getting into power I think you need to represent... try and represent everybody in the best way you can. I don't think necessarily one set of people is more important than another, ummm... because then that is just that is racism and it is discrimination and it is ageism and it is sexism if you are more swayed to one group of people than another ummm... and so I think the parties need to try and be balanced in their approaches and they need to see that everyone is important in terms of their views. I think the government puts a lot more of a focus at the well the current government on the sort of upper end of society as it were because they are the people that are generating the money and they tend to be a lot more vocal, than the... They tend to focus on the people taht are a lot more vocal than the others because they will make more noise about something if they are unhappy about it.

R: Can you tell me about your experience of politics online?

I: I don't necessarily get involved that much I tend to read a lot more than I discuss I don't... I have in the past read sort of the policies that the government and that the politicians will want to implement and things like that if they get into power... but I don't... I don't necessarily get involved as much as I should.

R: Is online politics different to "Ballot Box" politics?

I: Very much so... ummm... it is easier to connect to other people if you want to make a difference... than with the sort of "Ballot Box" politics as you put it, with that you can only rally with the people that are around you and you either may not find like minded people or you may not have enough in order to be able to... to band together to make any sort of change whereas online it is easier to create a larger community of people and a larger... a larger crowd in order to be able to make more of a difference.

R: Whose responsibility is it to get people invovled with politics?

I: I think it is everybodies, obviously the politicians need to encourage you to be more involved because it is their policies they want you to be involved with so it is up to them to make it easy and accesible for you to get involved, but I also think it is the publics perogative to get involved ummm... because it is your country ummm... it is everybodies country and it is everybodies government obviously the politicians are representing the rest of the country so in order for them to be representing us we need to be getting involved and rallying behind them, ummm... in order to be as represented a possible ummm... so I think its its... its a mixture of both it sort of... it starts with the politicians in order to sort of get the ball rolling but they shouldn't be doing on the work in terms of getting you invovled and I think online media is only helping people get involved with... because it is a lot easier to get involved, it is a lot less effort to sign an online petition than it is to go down to you local council and sign a

petition there or to present you opinions on an online forum than it is to write a letter to... 10 Downing street sort of thing.

R: What about the role of press in facilitating that sort of engagement?

I: Ummm... I think it is sort of a cheerleadery sort of situation in that they... they need to keep... they keep the momentum going the present the facts to you and they present the information you form... about current events and political events they are the sort of secretaries and cheerleaders of the world in that they... its their... its their role to provide you with the information ummm... so sort of the politician work hard in order to generate policies and ummm... their arguements and ummm... things like that and it's the newspapers... no not just news papers... the media's role to present that information to the public, they are the sort of messengers.

R: Do they give you enough information to get invovled?

I: There is a lot of corruption obviously, less so in the UK there is in other areas of the world but largely because of the accountability from the public and the politicians they need to present things that are going to be accurate. So I think largely that the accuracy of the information they provide is quite good because they will be ummm... sort of publically told that they are doing it wrong and thats either quite humiliating or they can be pun ished if they are providing something that is quite damning to one group of people or to one politician, unnecessarily but also it is also just morally, morally wrong.

R: What do you think could be done to help you or other young people invovled in the political process?

I: Ummm... I think... In not ignoring our views as much as hasd been done, obviously with the whole, with the current government a lot of us feel that it was... that we were not necessarily misrepresented but sold on one view and then the politicians went back on their word. So remaining honest and acknowledging us as a sort of group, as an important group is quite important in terms of that and using the education system to be able to encourage people... either... ummm... through scholls or online... I think using social media as a tool but the large people using social media and using online... well use the intern et are a slightly younger generation so I think using that as a platform helps encourage education in terms of pollotcis and involvement it is hard to be invovled in politics when you are sta behind a screen but you can make you view heard from behjind the screen and young people are quite lazy in terms of that... I think that politciains and media organisations should listen a lot more to young people and to help them... and that potentially would encourage us to get invovled if we feel we are being listened to a lot more we might feel we can make more of a change and so byu utilising social media and using online media it is going to help that as it is easier to respond to young people that way rather than television it iniates that dialogue as well which is another important thing.