‘OLD NEWS, YOUNG VIEWS’

HOW UK NEWS PROVIDERS ENGAGE YOUNG ADULT AUDIENCES (AGED 16-34) ON DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS.

by

LEON HAWTHORNE

A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of MA BY RESEARCH.

Department of Film & Creative Writing
School of English, Drama and Creative Studies
College of Arts and Law
University of Birmingham
June 2020

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Abstract

This thesis examines the changing patterns of news consumption by young adults in the United Kingdom, aged 16 to 34 years old, and the editorial responses to this by leading television news broadcasters. It begins with a comprehensive review of the most recent literature on incidental news exposure, personalisation, echo chambers and filter bubbles; combining this with analyses of key reports by industry and governmental sources. It proposes a new taxonomy of news consumption behaviours, and a new visual taxonomy of news using the RGB (red, green, blue) colour spectrum. Senior editors at ITV News, Channel 4 News, 5 News and Sky News were interviewed to provide insights into current digital strategies. The broadcasters' feedback to a questionnaire were studied for empirical evidence on audience behaviour, editorial decision making, and positioning within the aforementioned conceptual frameworks. This thesis concludes with a negation of the view that emerging news consumption patterns are problematic for political engagement. Instead it finds bold solutions within the industry's best practices and the literature for how broadcasters could reform their organisational structures to better serve young adult audiences.

Acknowledgements

My primary thanks go to my academic supervisors Dr Richard Langley and Professor W. Scott Lucas for their invaluable guidance, support, challenge and critique during this journey.

A special thanks to the Editors and/or Heads of Digital at ITV News, Channel 4 News, 5 News and Sky News for giving up generously their time and resources to assist me with my research; especially at a time when their in-trays were dominated by Brexit and the 2019 General Election.

I would like to thank Merete Østergaard and Henrik Petersen at the Danish School of Media & Journalism (‘DMJX’), for offering me — in 2018 — the opportunity to teach Cross-Media to undergraduates, based on my industry experience. Given three decades had elapsed since I had last stepped foot inside a university, this was a leap of faith, ultimately which re-ignited my enthusiasm for academic research. Thanks also to my students at DMJX for providing fresh insights into the mindset and behaviours of Generation Z.

Thanks to the University of Birmingham for offering me this degree course, by distance learning. I would not have begun this endeavour were it not for this mode of study, for which the university stands out as a beacon of pedagogical innovation compared to other Russell Group universities.

And finally, my love and thanks to my 6-year old son Milo, who daily provides me with the motivation to be a daddy, in whom he can be proud.

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.0 Research Rationale

Young adults in the United Kingdom aged 16-34 years old rapidly are abandoning traditional sources of news. They are buying fewer newspapers (Cairncross, 2019, pp.25-27) and watching less news on linear broadcast television (Ofcom, 2018, pp.24-29). Instead, they are migrating online, in particular to social media platforms using smart mobile devices (Reuters Institute, 2018, p.63). Many observers (Buckingham, 1996; Norris, 2001; Kim, Chen & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013; Lee, Kim & Koh, 2016) fear an apparent downward trend in news consumption among this demographic poses a challenge for political engagement and democracy.

There is particular concern about emerging methods of news consumption, namely ‘incidental news exposure’ (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017), the process of coming across news unintentionally, while doing something else online. Another concern is about ‘information overload’ (Lee, Kim & Koh, 2016), resulting in some young people choosing to avoid news, altogether.

Meanwhile, news organisations worry about their loss of hegemony and the concomitant commercial threat posed to their industry, as more people get their news vicariously via news aggregators, rather than going directly to news brands. Ofcom found:

> ‘This frequent scrolling through news content meant they [social media users] were less likely to actively seek out content (on TV, radio or online) as they always felt up to date’. (Ofcom, 2019b, p.27).

Additionally, greater reliance on digital platforms means news content increasingly is personalised and/or curated by algorithms, not by human journalists, thereby allegedly creating ‘filter bubbles’ (Pariser, 2011), where the range of stories young consumers likely encounter is reduced; giving rise to ‘information cocoons’ (Sunstein, 2009) or ‘echo chambers’, where the content to which they are exposed reinforces previously held political opinions.

1.0.1 Social context

There is a large volume of noise around this subject in the public arena, not least because the media loves talking about itself, and older people are wont to decry the behaviour of younger generations. But there also is a popular anti-technology trope running through the national culture, evidenced as far back as nineteenth century Luddites, who smashed textile factory machines that threatened their livelihoods (HL Deb 27 February 1812; Edgerton, 2011).

Presently, this anti-technology mood is manifested by those whose livelihoods are entangled in ‘old media’ — journalists, publishers, advertisers, regulators, politicians — against the new technology companies responsible for the rapid changes in the delivery of information. Also, it is being reinforced in the culture via continuous news stories about the ‘threats’ posed by the Internet and social media. Stories ranging from online child sex abuse, cyber bullying, cyber fraud,

and so on. Such news stories could be summarised with the headline: ‘Technology has changed; it’s bad, and it’s coming to get you.’

Clearly, nobody could deny some underlying threats exist. They pre-date the Internet and have now migrated online. But the decisions of editors readily to select these stories, and the style, tone and hysteria surrounding this reportage serves the same functional purpose as a sledgehammer in the hands of a Luddite machine-wrecker.

An exemplar of this was the widespread reporting of a study conducted by The Happiness Research Institute (2015) on mental health and its relationship to the use of social media. The headline in TheJournal.ie (2016) announced: ‘It's official — Facebook makes you miserable’. While the Independent (2016) wrote: ‘Facebook makes you unhappy and makes jealous people particularly sad’. Both newspapers reported accurately the findings of the study on 1,095 Danish Facebook users. My point is there was an unmistakeable glee detectable in the reporting of these stories, by those with a vested interest in preventing further encroachment of the new technology.

So, it is against this backdrop of powerful, political, cultural and commercial interest groups with the ability to influence an already anti-technology pre-disposition in the populace, that I embark upon this research.

1.0.2 Theoretical context

I have conducted a comprehensive review of the literature and industry reports to gain a clearer picture of the current state of news consumption among those

aged 16-34. Given the rapidity of change of the media landscape and the narrow age group under consideration, the focus has been on research produced in the past decade.

Studies have been conducted across many mature economies in the western world, including the USA, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, but surprisingly few in the UK. Most take the form of case studies and qualitative research, such as interviewing groups of young people about their media consumption. Fewer adopt an empirical, metadata-driven approach, interrogating data from visits to online platforms to analyse audience behaviour, without subjective input.

There is a wealth of quantitative data on audience consumption patterns produced by industry sources, notably the UK media regulator Ofcom and the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, in whom much reliance has been placed.

These sources explore mostly the demand side of news, i.e., the behaviour of consumers and the consequences of that behaviour on those consumers and society, at large. While this is a critical backdrop, my main area of interest is the supply side of news, namely the actions of — and effects upon — producers and distributors of news. There is less research on the supply side; that which there is includes examinations of public service broadcasters adapting to changing political and commercial climes.

An area where more contemporary research is required is how digital and social media platforms affect the style and substance of news content. This is a key area of exploration in this thesis. McLuhan (1964, pp.7-23) wrote: ‘the

medium is the message', meaning the platform was more important than the content it contained, and the platform shaped the content. If that was true at the arrival of broadcast television in the 1950s — of which McLuhan wrote — is it true also for the impact of digital platforms on the now 'old media' of TV?

It is worth noting there is a dichotomy, on the supply side, between news producers and news distributors, wherein the latter group merely facilitates search for, or aggregation of, content belonging to the former group. This research is more concerned with the actions of producers than the actions of distributors.

1.0.3 Methodology of field research

I approached the UK's five major national television news broadcasters — BBC News, ITV News, Channel 4 News, 5 News and Sky News — to procure their input on how audiences aged 16-34 are consuming news on digital and social media platforms, and what have been their strategic editorial responses to that. All but BBC News agreed to participate, and nominated either their Editors or Heads of Digital to respond to a written questionnaire and participate in several telephone interviews. All provided in-house audience data and were generous with their time. Whilst, of course, all had digital strategies, the questions focussed on the degree to which they had editorial strategies specifically to appeal to 16-34s. Had they discerned sub-genres within news, or styles of storytelling that appeal disproportionately to younger demographic groups? What is the pattern of news consumption, and to what extent is this different

from that of older adults? Also understanding platform-specific strategies, cross-media approaches, audience segmentation and content marketing.

These interviews were supplemented by an extensive review and analysis of the four participants' news output on digital platforms, studying methods of journalistic storytelling, headline writing, the use of graphics and videographic imagery.

1.0.4 Perspective

I have a personal background as a practitioner of news broadcasting, which is relevant to disclose, as this likely gave me some perspectives about how the participants practise their business.

I have worked for thirty years in the television industry. I was a local television news reporter for ITV in Bristol and London; a World News Anchor for CNN International, and a member of the Westminster Lobby, reporting politics for network BBC News. I was Founder and Chief Executive Officer of two satellite television channels, The Baby Channel and Simply TV, and since 2008, I have worked as a consultant on digital content strategy for the CEOs of Hearst Magazines, the London Evening Standard and the Independent newspaper.

This background in television news, channel management and digital strategy presented some risk of subjectivity, however my belief was this was outweighed by the benefits of industry knowledge, accompanied by a journalistic and academic devotion to fairness.

1.1 Structure of thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters. This chapter, Chapter One, introduces the research rationale, the social context and the structure of the thesis. Chapter Two outlines the demographic and psychographic data on the segment of the UK population aged 16-34 years old. Chapter Three analyses the most recent industry data on how 16-34s consume news, i.e., which media devices, platforms and channels do they use, especially where this is different to other age groups.

Chapter Four reviews the literature on how social media impacts news consumption, in particular, examining research on incidental news exposure, information overload, engagement with content and the 'Digital Divide' (Norris, 2001). Chapter Five continues the literature review, focussing on filter bubbles, echo chambers and personalisation of content.

Having laid out the factual and intellectual framework, Chapter Six lays out the findings from my field research, questioning four leading UK television news broadcasters on how their organisations have responded to changing habits of young adults.

Chapter Seven is my conclusion, based on the findings from the literature, industry data and field research. This includes an exposition on the implications of my analysis, including a discussion of what current trends in digital technology and editorial strategy might mean for news broadcasters' strategies, going forward. It ends with recommendations for areas of further research.

Chapter Eight contains Appendices, mainly copies of the Participant Information Sheet, and the (blank) Consent Form and Questionnaire used on the research subjects. The completed questionnaires are omitted, as only the statements, data and quotes included in the body of the thesis have been cleared by the participants for publication.

The final section is a list of References of works cited.

Chapter 2
Demographics and psychographics of 16-34 year old news consumers

2.0 UK adults aged 16-34 years old

The age cohort of sixteen to thirty-four year olds (‘16-34’) is one used habitually by advertisers and media owners, who — for commercial and marketing reasons — divide the population into demographic groups, by age. Whereas life-stage can be a useful metric, the big broadcasters focus specifically on age, as I will do throughout this thesis. The 16-34 group comprises 16.1 million people, some 24.5 per cent of the UK population (Table 2.1), and its behaviour towards news media portends future behaviours of the nation as a whole.

There is a near two-decade age gap between the youngest and oldest members of this cohort. Moreover, due to teenage pregnancies, I calculate approximately 66,000 of the cohort are the grown-up children of other members of the same cohort; for example, the 18-year old child of a 34-year old mother. This number is based on extrapolations from raw data provided by the Office for National Statistics (‘ONS’), (Appendix, 8.3).

So, it is sometimes helpful to sub-divide the group into those aged 16-24 (44 per cent) and those aged 25-34 (56 per cent). Presently, this sub-division corresponds with ‘Generation Z’ and ‘Generation Y’, respectively. Whilst these are marketing terms that are not strictly defined, in popular culture, Generation Z is said to include those born after the mid 1990s, whilst Generation Y — also known as ‘millennials’ — are those born between 1980 and 1995, (Williams, 2015).

An interesting characteristic of 16-34s is they are the only age cohort where males outnumber females; 50.7 per cent are male, whereas for the population as a whole, aged up to 89 years, males comprise just 49.5 per cent (Table 2.1). More precisely, males of every age from 0 to 29 years outnumber females of the same age. This is significant because females outnumber males for every age group from 33 to 89 years (Office for National Statistics, 2018, Figure 3).

While this demographic quirk is a side note to this research, Childwise (2017) found evidence older teenage boys and girls have different levels of interest in news and current affairs (Figure 3.4), so it is plausible 16-34s, as a cohort, exhibit more male-leaning news consumption tendencies than older age groups.

Table 2.1. ONS: Population pyramid for UK, mid-2018 (extract)

Age	Population	% all ages	Male	% Male	Female	% Female
0-89	65,851,526	100.0%	32,606,716	49.5%	33,244,810	50.5%
0-15	12,624,179	19.2%	6,469,022	51.2%	6,155,157	48.8%
16-24	7,141,092	10.8%	3,669,496	51.4%	3,471,596	48.6%
25-34	8,990,532	13.7%	4,516,789	50.2%	4,473,743	49.8%
16-34	16,131,624	24.5%	8,186,285	50.7%	7,945,339	49.3%
35-89	37,095,723	56.3%	17,951,409	48.4%	19,144,314	51.6%
16	702,583	1.1%	360,771	51.3%	341,812	48.7%
17	724,823	1.1%	371,195	51.2%	353,628	48.8%
18	746,996	1.1%	384,777	51.5%	362,219	48.5%
19	782,115	1.2%	401,688	51.4%	380,427	48.6%
20	800,053	1.2%	411,122	51.4%	388,931	48.6%
21	828,759	1.3%	426,309	51.4%	402,450	48.6%
22	838,020	1.3%	432,658	51.6%	405,362	48.4%
23	844,591	1.3%	433,554	51.3%	411,037	48.7%
24	873,152	1.3%	447,422	51.2%	425,730	48.8%
25	878,510	1.3%	447,101	50.9%	431,409	49.1%
26	907,985	1.4%	457,870	50.4%	450,115	49.6%
27	927,145	1.4%	470,965	50.8%	456,180	49.2%
28	910,610	1.4%	462,696	50.8%	447,914	49.2%
29	902,925	1.4%	454,070	50.3%	448,855	49.7%
30	911,139	1.4%	455,376	50.0%	455,763	50.0%
31	888,406	1.3%	439,884	49.5%	448,522	50.5%
32	895,720	1.4%	448,165	50.0%	447,555	50.0%
33	894,949	1.4%	447,012	49.9%	447,937	50.1%
34	873,143	1.3%	433,650	49.7%	439,493	50.3%

Source: Office for National Statistics, National Records of Scotland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency – Population Estimates. Data for those aged 90+ has been excluded. Percentages separately calculated by Leon Hawthorne.

2.1 Digital Natives in an age of participation

Generation Z has grown up entirely in the digital era. Its members are all ‘Digital Natives’ (Prensky, 2001), with no experience of life before the Internet and social media. They contrast with older generations, who Prensky labels ‘Digital Immigrants’, who have learned to use these new technologies, but doing so is not their first impulse.

Prensky (2001, p.2) wrote:

> ‘As Digital Immigrants learn — like all immigrants, some better than others — to adapt to their environment, they always retain, to some degree, their ‘accent’, that is, their foot in the past. The ‘digital immigrant accent’ can be seen in such things as turning to the Internet for information second, rather than first… Today’s older folk were ‘socialised' differently from their kids, and are now in the process of learning a new language’.

So, it is a natural, first instinct of Generation Z to use mobile telephones for all forms of content. Older people act differently because they think differently, because they were socialised to use the prevailing media technologies of their times.

Members of the cohort aged 25-34 are in Generation Y. They will have residual memories of technology before the digital age. Someone aged 34 years old in 2020 was born in 1986. By the time, they had completed high school in 2004, Apple Inc. had not yet launched the iPhone (July 2007); Facebook was not yet open to the public (September 2006); Twitter was still on the drawing board

(until July 2006), and YouTube had not yet launched officially (until November 2005). The third generation of mobile broadband telephony (3G) had only just arrived in the United Kingdom in 2003, so most Britons at that time were living in the era of ‘Web 1.0’, one of passive consumption of content via slow and unreliable Internet connections. All this means older members of the 16-34 cohort grew up with totally different experiences of media than younger members of the cohort.

It was only with the arrival of social media in 2005-2007 that Britain entered the era of ‘Web 2.0’, differentiated by users’ ability to interact with online content. Sun Microsystems CEO, Scott McNealy defined the impending new era as an ‘age of participation’. On 24 June 2005, he told CNET:

> ‘We believe we're moving out of the Ice Age, the Iron Age, the Industrial Age, the Information Age, to the participation age. You get on the Net and you do stuff. You IM (instant message), you blog, you take pictures, you publish, you podcast, you transact, you distance learn, you telemedicine. You are participating on the Internet, not just viewing stuff’. (CNET, 2005).

McNealy’s prediction of greater user participation was prophetic and it is vital to an understanding of news consumption today, as well as to understanding overlapping trends in marketing. In the book, ‘Marketing 3.0’, the authors argue technology is central to this shift in culture:

> ‘New wave technology is technology that enables connectivity and interactivity of individuals and groups. The technology allows individuals to express themselves and collaborate with others… In the age of participation, people create news, ideas and entertainment as well as consume them’. (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2010, pp.6-7).

Technology is a determining factor in behaviours and attitudes towards media among each new generation. Just as Johannes Gutenberg’s printing press catalysed the Protestant Reformation (Howard, 2006), so too did broadband Internet and smartphones create a cultural revolution affecting all media consumption, today.

Most 16-34s grew up in the ‘age of participation’ and are thus reluctant to be passive recipients of content. Participation can take many forms, but at the simplest level, the new mindset means the idea of sitting silently for half an hour, being lectured at by a middle aged man in a suit (Figure 3.1) jars with everything this generation has learned from the Internet. Why sit, when you can walk? Why watch it on a TV at home, when you can watch it a smartphone? Why listen silently when you can share your thoughts with the world? Why watch half a dozen stories, in which you have no interest, when you can jump directly to the story you want to watch? Herein lay the deficiencies of analogue media — TV, radio and print — which 16-34s can circumvent by using the Internet, in general, and social media, in particular.

They do it for entertainment, for movies, for games, for finding sexual partners, so there is no obvious reason why news would be any different. News is just

another genre of content: ‘vying for the attention of the user with other online activities’ (Ofcom 2019b, p.27). Whilst it is argued news performs a vital democratic function, which other genres of content do not, it is still a media form, not immune from the technological and commercial forces affecting the distribution of all media, nor immune from the psychographic factors affecting consumption.

2.2 News psychographics of 16-34s

Every age demographic will have tendencies that differentiate it from other age groups. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism examined the degree to which the psychographics — that is, the attitudes, ideas and opinions — of Generations Y and Z manifest in their actions towards news (Reuters Institute, 2019). It identified four key ‘moments’ when young people consume news. These range from: the rare ‘Dedicated’ times when they are deeply introspective and knowledge-seeking; ‘Updated’, where quick and efficient summaries are sought; ‘Time-filler’, where news is used to fill a void while doing other things, to ‘Intercepted’ moments, when users observe an interruptive news alert, flashing on their phone (Text Box 2.1).

These ‘moments’ represent a sliding scale of attention, engagement and exposure to news. Many would not be possible without permanent connectivity to high speed Internet, and the geo-spatial ubiquity of mobile phones. Today, 16-34s have choices that were not available in the pre-digital age, so it is not surprising they would have different behaviours and attitudes to news consumption than their parents’ generation.

Text Box 2.1. Reuters Institute: Four typical key moments for younger groups

Dedicated: Finding time to focus on the news, like a novel or a TV series. Less common; suits evenings or weekends. **Mindset:** more introspective; deepening understanding.
Updated: Getting the key news updates you need efficiently. Suits mornings; preparing for the day. **Mindset**: more something I feel I need to do.
Time-filler: Not about the news per se; something to do while doing something else. Constant: on the train, break, when time to fill. **Mindset:** more something I do to distract/amuse.
Intercepted: A notification or message intercepts what was being done. Can happen anytime and anywhere. **Mindset:** passive recipient.
Source: Reuters Digital News Report 2019. Reuters Institute. p.55.

While Reuters Institute offered four ‘moments’, Ofcom offered three ‘journeys’ for news consumption: ‘habitual’, ‘goal-driven' and ‘incidental’. Habitual consumption is ‘accessing news content, usually through one source, regularly, as part of a routine’ (Figure 2.1). Ofcom found this to be the least likely model for younger viewers, and more typical of their parents and grandparents, who were inclined to gather around the television set at six o’clock to get their habitual fix of the evening news (Ofcom, 2019b, pp.26-27).

Figure 2.1 Ofcom: Three typical news journeys

From Figure 2.1, Ofcom’s ‘goal-driven’ consumption involves ‘actively looking for news content to either fact-check, hear about breaking news or extra information around a topic’. This type of consumption is associated with using a search engine like Google, and selecting from the various news sources it presents.

And the final class of journey, ‘incidental consumption’ involves: ‘accidentally coming across news while doing something else, usually through social media, word of mouth or notification’ (Ibid.). Here, the user does not choose the news subject or news provider; instead a story is thrust at him or her via a ‘push notification’, likely from a news aggregator or social media feed. Ofcom explained:

> ‘At these times, people generally had a different mindset. They were on these platforms to be entertained or to catch up with friends, rather than actively to seek news’. (Ofcom, 2019b, p.27).

Another analysis of news consumption was offered by Lee, Kim and Koh (2016), who, while examining online users’ responses to a perceived glut of news information, identified three ‘patterns’ of news consumption they termed ‘news avoidance’, ‘selective exposure’, and ‘willingness to pay for news’.

‘News avoidance’ is the response to a feeling of fatigue arising from the sheer volume of news content available across multiple platforms and channels. Some consumers switch off — literally and metaphorically — to minimise their exposure to news. Lee, Kim and Koh (2016, p.7) found people with little interest in the news practised news avoidance; however the trait was also associated with being male, young and highly educated. Ironically, they found even those with high levels of interest in the news practised news avoidance, once they had reached a point of ‘news information overload’.

The researchers wrote:

> ‘Many participants felt avoiding news would be the most convenient and comfortable way to handle abundant news information, instead of making a proactive decision about what news to consume and how much to consume’. (Lee, Kim & Koh, 2016, p.9).

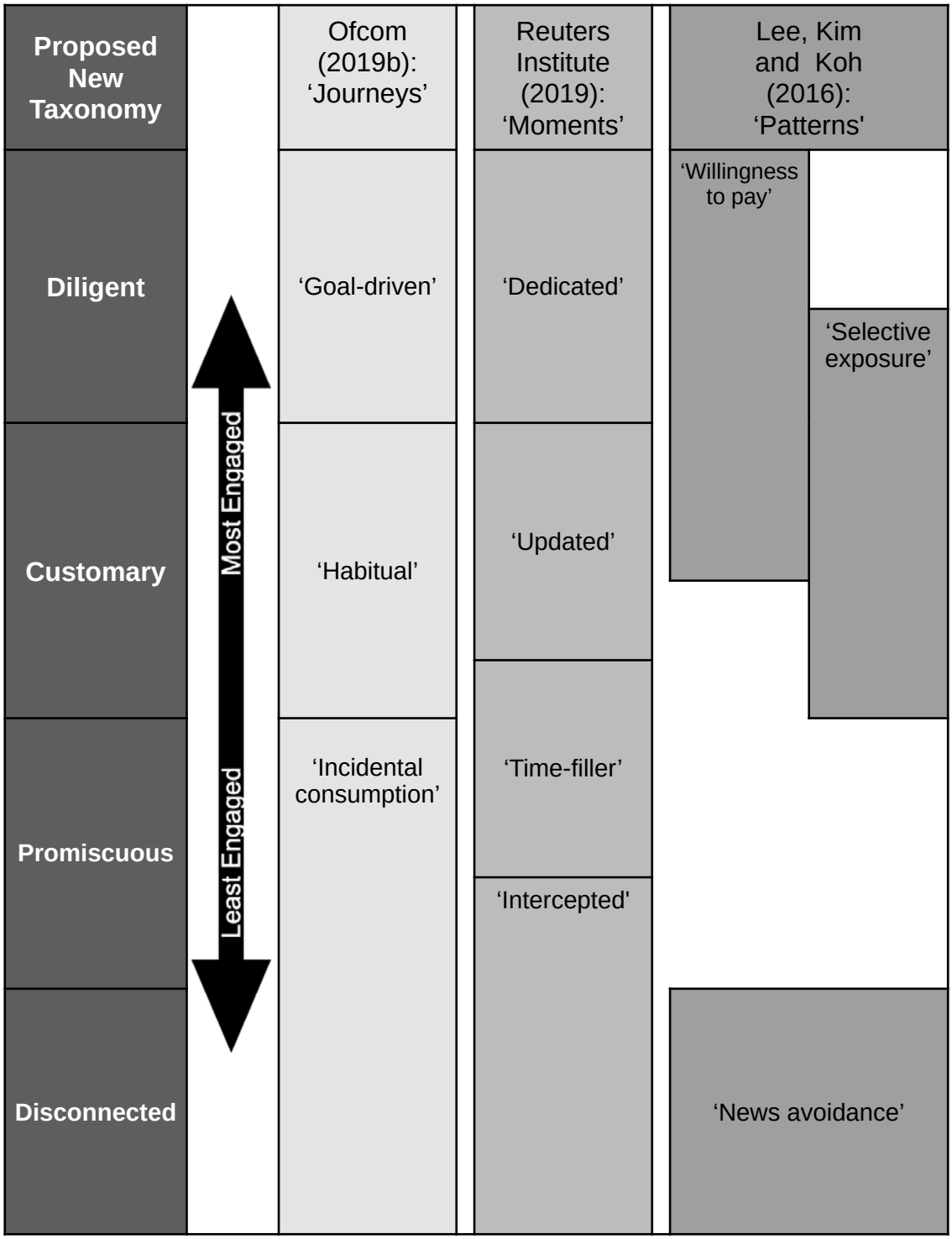
At the other extreme of the news engagement spectrum, the ‘willingness to pay for news’ applied to:

> ‘…those who identified quality news sources [who] might be willing to pay the cost and use those sources consistently as a way to deal with the problem of information overload’. (Ibid., 4).

And in between these two categories is ‘selective exposure’. While the authors conceded all consumption is selective, they concluded ‘selective exposure’ is a purposeful response to limit news consumption, both by quantity and quality.

These three sets of ‘moments’, ‘journeys’ and ‘patterns’ offered by Reuters Institute, Ofcom, and Lee, Kim and Koh (2016) describe overlapping behaviours and mindsets. Table 2.2 is my attempt to merge and simplify these terms, and create a new taxonomy of news consumption. It is clear the ten separate original terms describe a continuum, from the most purposeful efforts to acquire and consume news, to the least. I reduce the overall list from ten to four new terms: Diligent, Customary, Promiscuous and Disconnected.

Table 2.2. A new taxonomy of news consumption



For the new taxonomy of news consumption in Table 2.2, the following rationale and definitions are applied:

1. **Diligent:** the characteristic of going to great lengths to find time to consume news and stay informed about current affairs. This describes the most avid pattern of news consumption, directly echoing the Reuters Institute ‘dedicated’ term, and overlapping with ‘willingness to pay’, ‘selective exposure’ and ‘goal driven’.

2. **Customary:** the characteristic of consuming news as a matter of routine, perhaps at scheduled times, such as reading a newspaper during the morning commute to work, or tuning in to a radio news programme over breakfast. Customary consumption is done by force of habit, or inertia. For many young people, it will be a tradition inherited from their parents, and likely will be practised more often among affluent and educated households. However, Customary consumption does not represent deep engagement with, or enthusiasm for, the content. It simply is a custom; done for no good reason other than because it has been done before. Subscribing to a newspaper counts as Customary consumption, so this category overlaps with ‘willingness to pay’, ‘selective exposure’, ‘habitual’, as well as ‘updating’ and ‘time-filler’.

3. **Promiscuous:** the characteristic of consumers getting news wherever they can, whenever it suits them, without any sense of loyalty to a news brand, or any huge effort being applied to get the news. It is a ‘take it or leave it’ casual approach to news, and to those who provide it. As with ‘incidental

exposure', this involves stumbling across news accidentally while doing something else, albeit after this initial exposure, consumers may choose to engage deeper and metamorphose into Diligent consumption. Promiscuous consumption applies equally to digital and analog media. It describes the behaviour of a TV viewer, who after watching a favoured game show, cannot be bothered to switch channels when the evening news comes on, or a passenger in the back seat of a taxi, forced to listen to the taxi-driver's choice of radio phone-in show. This category overlaps with 'incidental', 'time-fillers' and 'intercepted'.

4. **Disconnected:** this is analogous with Lee, Kim and Koh's 'news avoidance'. It is the characteristic of going out of one's way to be disconnected from the prevailing news agenda. While it is impossible to avoid news altogether — accidentally, or by word of mouth — this behaviour is the least engaged, and thus the polar opposite of 'Diligent'. In May 2020, in Week 6 of the UK's COVID-19 pandemic crisis, Ofcom found 94 per cent of the UK population, with Internet access, had consumed information about the crisis 'at least once a day' (Ofcom, 2020). The residual 6 per cent were the most Disconnected from COVID-19 news.

It is important to point out these four terms are more accurately used to describe instances of — or motivations for — behaviour, rather than to describe people or audience personas. Whilst it might be shorthand to say: 'John is a Promiscuous consumer', it would be more accurate to say: 'the particular behaviour of John on that day, at that time, about that subject displayed

Promiscuous consumption’. This is because consumers are complex beings and they practise multiple types of consumption, simultaneously. The person who is avoiding all news about COVID-19 is expressing ‘Disconnected’ behaviour. But on another topic, within the same hour, they may well read a magazine article (‘Customary’) or search Google for information about mortgage interest rates (‘Diligent’).

Instead of Diligent, Customary, Promiscuous and Disconnected being distinct types of people, these are character traits that all viewers have — like the industrious Dr Jekyll and the violent Mr Hyde — and depending on the circumstance, and the story, one trait will be more dominant than the others.

2.3 Summary

The age cohort ‘16-34’ contains 16.1 million people, comprising a quarter of the UK's population. Sometimes it is helpful to split the cohort into those aged 16-24 (‘Generation Z’) and those aged 25-34 ('Generation Y’ or ‘millennials’). These age groups have been chosen, rather than life-stages, because they are used widely by broadcasters and advertisers.

Members of this age cohort are all ‘Digital Natives’ (Prensky, 2001), who have lived most of their adult lives in an era of digital technology, such as broadband Internet, smartphones and social media. Unlike older generations, they are completely at ease with this technology; it is their natural first choice to use these for consuming content.

Around 2005, Britain entered the era of ‘Web 2.0’, differentiated by users’ ability to interact with online content. This heralded an ‘age of participation’ (CNET, 2005); changing how people could create and consume content; transforming the attitudes, ideas and opinions of 16-34s towards media.

Contrasting various journeys, moments and patterns of news consumption in the literature, I have created a new taxonomy of news consumption (Table 2.2), identifying four news consumption behaviours, ranging from the most engaged to the least engaged: Diligent, Customary, Promiscuous and Disconnected. Critically, these are behaviours all people manifest, sometimes simultaneously, but there is evidence 16-34s increasingly are moving towards more Promiscuous and less Customary consumption (Ofcom, 2018, pp.24-29).

Chapter 3
How do 16-34s get their news?

3.0 A definition of news

When considering a case of alleged hard core pornography in 1964, members of the United States Supreme Court failed to agree a definition of pornography. Famously, Justice Potter Stewart wrote: ‘I know it when I see it’ (Jacobellis v. Ohio, 378 U.S. 184, 1964, para. 197). Likely, a definition of ‘news’ may prove equally nebulous, but one would be helpful to an examination of patterns of news consumption.

Echoing the sentiment from the bench, a former editor of mine once told me:

> ‘News is whatever the editor says is news’.

But if a definition of news is subjective, any analysis of what people say about news may be misleading, because they are using different definitions. And if news is defined only by editors, there may be a disconnect between what editors publish and what audiences choose to consume. In Chapter 7, I contend the latter is the core of the problem that is the topic of this thesis.

Significantly, the Ofcom Broadcasting Code (Ofcom, 2019c) does not define news, despite including a whole section — Section 5 — devoted to regulating it. However, the Code defines a sub-category of news, for which there are special impartiality requirements on broadcasters, as:

> ‘…matters of major political or industrial controversy and major matters relating to current public policy’. (Ofcom, 2019c, para 5.11).

A video of a skateboarding bulldog (BBC News, 2015), or a story about where a royal bride procured her wedding dress (BBC News, 2011) may not universally be perceived as news, although these are examples of stories that ran on primetime BBC newscasts. If a sixteen year old saw one of these stories on Instagram, it is unlikely they would say they had consumed news. (Sveningsson, 2015).

Sveningsson (2015) conducted research in Sweden on young people who consumed most of their news on social media. She found they underestimated the volume of news they consumed, implying a dissociation between their perception of news and the digital means by which they had acquired it. In plain terms, if they saw it on TV, or in a form labelled as ‘news’, they were more likely to define it as ‘news’, whereas if they saw it on Instagram:

> ‘…the participants did not regard social media news as ‘real news’’. (Ibid.,1).

In his seminal work ‘Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man’, Marshall McLuhan wrote: ‘the medium is the message’ (McLuhan, 1964, pp.7-23), referring to the primacy of media platforms over the content they carry. Based on Sveningsson (2015), the medium is not only the message, the medium determines also how consumers define the genre of the message.

Barnhurst and Wartella (1998, pp.281-284) and Costera Meijer (2007) found young people do not necessarily differentiate news from other forms of entertainment and information; reinforcing the point 16-34s may consume what others define as ‘news’ without being aware of this:

> ‘…young people experience news as just one genre out of many in the never-ending flow of television images’. (Costera Meijer, 2007, p.99).

Returning to the contention editors define what is news, feminist writers have identified a ‘gendered nature of journalism’ (Van Zoonen, 1998, p.36), suggesting male and female editors define news differently and have different priorities within news.

> ‘Female and male journalists perceive journalism differently; that is, they consider different topics, angles, sources and ethics to be important. For example, so called ‘masculine’ journalism focuses on politics, crime, finance, education and upbringing, while ‘feminine’ journalism involves human interest, consumer news, culture and social policy’. (Everbach & Flournoy, 2007, p.53).

Drawing a distinction between (a) a definition of news and (b) what types of stories are included in the news is — for practical journalists — redundant. On any given day, news is definable as (let us say) the Top Ten stories of the day. Story #11 does not make it into the bulletin. My former editor would say: ‘It is not news’, meaning it is not important enough. The fact the substance of Story #11 might be classifiable under a theoretical definition of news does not make any difference in the real world, if the story is never published.

In a practical sense, news is whatever the editor includes in his or her publication. Van Zoonen (1998) and Everbach and Flournoy (2007) imply male editors exclude stories which female editors would include; therefore it is

obligatory a definition of news takes into account the perspectives and agendas of that group of people who become editors.

The form of storytelling also has an impact on the consumers' perception of content as 'news'. Coleman, Morrison and Anthony (2011) found the public were very interested in news that was amusing, such as celebrity gossip. At the same time they felt social pressure to acknowledge such 'guilty' pleasures were not 'real news'; news was something defined by elites, and delivered to ordinary people as manna from Heaven.

> 'Acceptance of this dichotomy between 'real' and 'popular news' is based upon a moral perspective that news only becomes News when it is spoken about in certain ways, connected to remote and formidable institutions… In short, there was what people thought of as newsworthy and what they thought of as permissible material for the sacred space of News'. (Coleman, Morrison & Anthony, 2011, p.41).

The standard form of UK, prime-time, terrestrial television newscasts is a white, middle aged, middle class man, wearing a suit, sitting behind a desk, with colourful graphics over his shoulder (Figure 3.1). If one removed this style, or used the style for other programming genres, likely it would confuse the public perception of the category of content being consumed.

For example, 'The Daily Show with Trevor Noah' (Comedy Central, 2020) employs the same storytelling techniques as a traditional television newscast. The subjects covered match those on news networks, yet its presenter is a young, black comedian who interlaces commentary on current events with

humour. So, is it ‘news’? Arguably, the 16-34s who watch the show on YouTube do not care. They may have become non-binary on genre issues.

Figure 3.1. UK’s main public service broadcasters’ lead news anchors

BBC News at Ten’s lead anchor is Huw Edwards (aged 58); ITV News at Ten’s lead anchor is Tom Bradby (aged 53); Channel 4 News is led by Jon Snow (aged 72); only 5 News has a female lead anchor, Sian Williams (aged 55). (June 2020).

Whether a particular story is ‘news’ is a daily subject of debate in newsrooms. In my experience, the sub-conscious algorithm used by journalists to define news combines a number of factors:

(i) Is the information new?

‘News' must contain information that is new, or at least, newly revealed. The former Washington Post publisher, Philip L. Graham, was attributed with

saying: journalism is the ‘first rough draft of history’ (Shafer, 2010). Historians write about the past, which we call ‘history’. Journalists write about the same class of events in the present, which we call ‘news’. Therefore, one definition of news is: history minus time. However, this definition is deficient because news could only be defined with the benefit of hindsight. It requires a definition of ‘history’, which would be a circuitous route, and one beyond the scope of this thesis.

(ii) Is the information in the public interest?

Ofcom’s definition (above) (Ofcom, 2019c, para 5.11) of a sub-category of news refers to political or industrial controversy; issues that are about public policy and matters up for debate or discussion. These are matters centred around laws, the exercise of political or commercial power, and actions taken by public bodies. This could be labelled ‘serious news’.

(iii) Is the information interesting to the public?

This is a vexatious category because the public is interested in subjects that do not fall within the definition of ‘in the public interest’. Paul Dacre, the former editor of the Daily Mail, commented on the distinction:

> ‘I don’t agree with the Guardian’s decision to publish Snowden [The Guardian, 2013]… But I also passionately believe the Guardian must have the freedom to carry such stories. The sadness is that Alan [Rusbridger, then editor of the Guardian] cannot see that the Sun should have the freedom to write about the love lives of celebrities and

> footballers, who are of such interest to their readers. In order to act in the public interest, they need to interest the public'. (Press Gazette, 2018).

Dacre's argument was newspapers need to make a profit, which they do by publishing stories that are 'interesting to the public', which — in many cases — are stories the Guardian might not define as 'in the public interest'. But by doing so, they gain commercial viability and a large audience, which enables them to publish other stories that are 'in the public interest', made more impactful because of the large audience they reach.

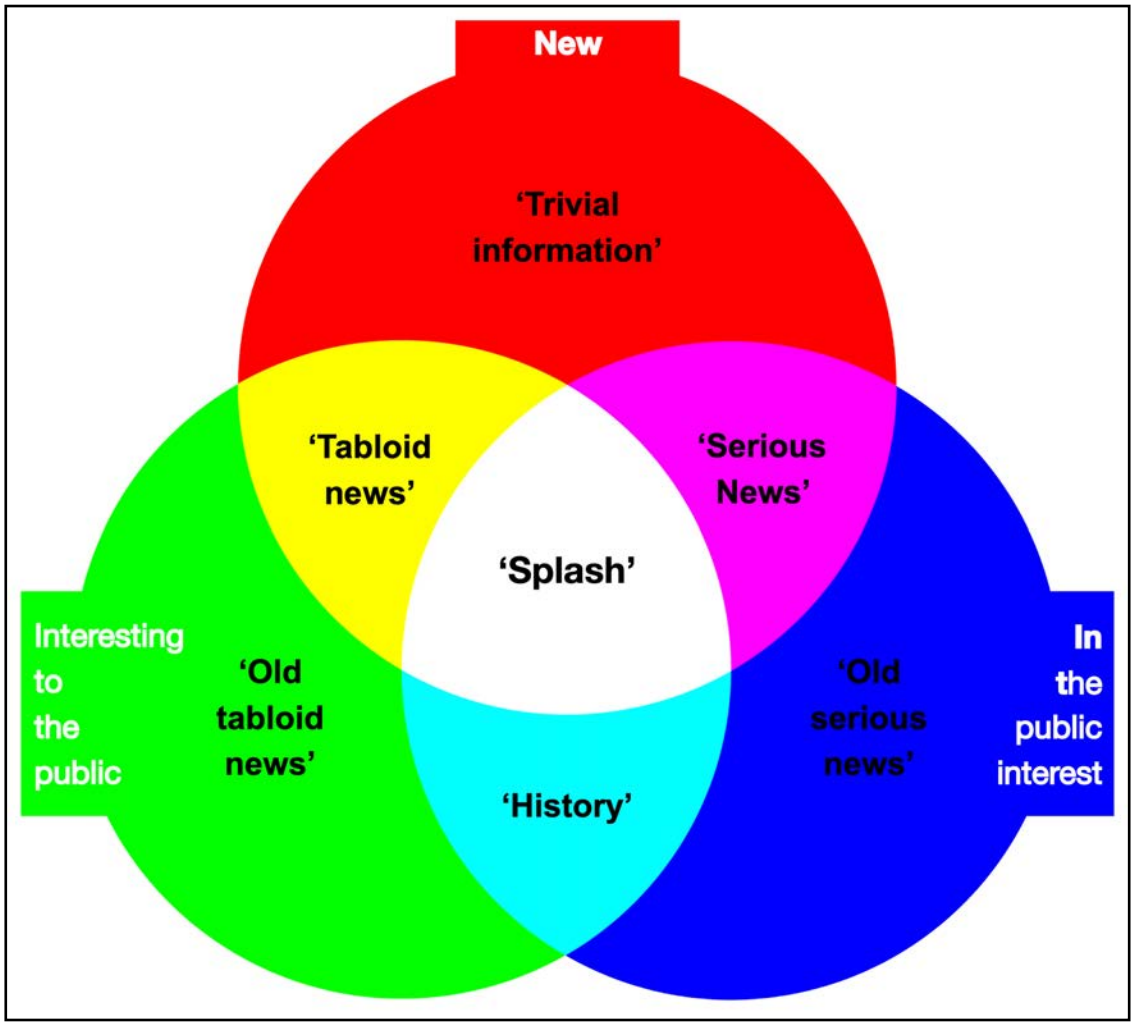
Dacre criticised:

> '…the emergence of the Metropolitan Echo Chamber… [whose] inhabitants increasingly haven't a clue what real people in Britain, outside the M25, are thinking'. (Press Gazette, 2018).

This was not merely a clash of cultures, or the old debate between 'hard news and its antithesis, soft news' (Tuchman, 1978, p.113). Dacre's dispute with the 'Metropolitan Echo Chamber' was they were denying his type of journalism was even classifiable as 'news', or 'worthwhile news'. He was pointing to the same intellectual snobbery and social deference to which Coleman, Morrison and Anthony (2011) referred in their distinction between 'real news' and 'popular news'. And it was the same dichotomy, which Sveningsson (2015) discovered in the minds of young social media users, between interesting information on Instagram and 'real news', which — by inference — must be boring, must be about politics (Text Box 3.2), and must be classified as 'news' by an elite.

Pulling together these threads, Figure 3.2 is my attempt to create a new visual taxonomy of news, using what physicists call the 'RGB spectrum'. Sir Isaac Newton demonstrated if one shines beams of the three primary colours of light onto a white surface, the colours magenta, cyan, yellow and white are produced in the overlapping areas (Newton, 1730). So, projecting my three primary attributes of news — where red represents the 'new', green is 'interesting to the public' and blue is 'in the public interest' — I postulate the following:

Figure 3.2. A new visual taxonomy of news using the RGB spectrum



Where something is ‘new’ (red) and ‘interesting to the public’ (green), this can be termed ‘tabloid news’ (yellow). This would include stories about the love lives of celebrities, to which Dacre referred (Press Gazette, 2018).

Where something is ‘new’ (red) and ‘in the public interest’ (blue), this can be termed ‘serious news’ (magenta). This would include matters of political or industrial controversy, in the Broadcasting Code (Ofcom, 2019c, para 5.11).

Where something is ‘new’ (red) and ‘in the public interest’ (blue) and ‘interesting to the public’ (green), this can be termed a ‘splash’ (white). This is the most sought-after category of news by journalists, as it includes matters of political controversy that also are of huge interest to the public. For example, the Daily Telegraph’s reporting in 2009 of a scandal over expenses paid to Members of Parliament (The Daily Telegraph, 2009).

Things that are only new (red only), but are neither ‘interesting to the public’ (green) nor ‘in the public interest’ (blue) can be categorised as ‘trivial information’, which may be of interest to narrow audiences, such as one’s immediate family and friends. This is the kind of information used to fill up personal social media pages, which might include photographs of what one had for dinner, or where one went at the weekend.

Where events do not overlap with ‘new’ (red), they are in the past; these include ‘old serious news’ (blue, only) and ‘old tabloid news’ (green, only).

The cyan coloured area is matters ‘in the public interest’ (blue) that are also ‘interesting to the public’ (green), but are no longer ‘new’ (red); this is history.

3.1 A definition of social media

The Cambridge Dictionary defines ‘social media’ as:

> ‘Websites and computer programs that allow people to communicate and share information on the internet using a computer or mobile phone’.

And it defines ‘social networking site’ as:

> ‘A website that is designed to help people communicate and share information, photographs, etc., with a group’.

There appears little distinction between these two definitions. The terms often are used interchangeably. However, there is a subtle difference. ‘Social media’ refers to a technology platform used by media creators to transmit their works to audiences in order to facilitate a dialogue. Whereas social networking sites (‘SNS’) are platforms, through which users create a community in order to communicate with other users. Essentially, social media is about the media engaging with an audience, whereas SNS is about the ‘people formerly known as the audience’ (Rosen, 2006) engaging with each other.

In 2008, Facebook founder, Mark Zuckerberg offered a definition that could apply to all SNS:

> ‘Facebook is about helping people share information and share themselves’. (Paczkowski, 2008).

Whilst tech entrepreneur, Michael Cohn, offered a clarification:

> ‘Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. Social networking, on the other hand, is a social structure with people who are joined by a common interest’. (Cohn, 2011).

So, social media and social networks overlap and reinforce one another. There is a ‘chicken and egg’ symbiotic relationship between them. Content is published on social media and it is circulated and modified via social networks, and vice versa. Invariably, the platform is the same for both — Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., — but there is nuance between the two functions.

The two phenomena demonstrate the evolution of engagement with media, brought about by the digital revolution. Historically, ‘old media’ manifested as a monologue. A small elite of journalists had the information. They proceeded beneficently to disseminate this to the audience, at fixed times and in fixed formats throughout the day. The audience received the news, largely passively. Shouting at the television or throwing a newspaper into the bin were the principal methods of interacting with the content.

But the era of Web 2.0, with the launch of social media platforms in the UK — like Facebook in 2006 — permitted users to communicate more effectively with news makers. The audience could respond immediately — by clicking ‘like’, ‘dislike’, ‘thumbs up’, ‘vote for / against’ — as well as sharing more expansive comments. Social media represented the opening of a return path, through which news editors could — if they chose — enter a dialogue with the

audience; it offered the opportunity for audience participation, co-creation of content and for the audience to influence the choice of stories covered.

To this day, this opportunity has not been fulfilled by major UK news broadcasters. Most senior journalists have been groomed in a professional culture of doing the news in one way — preparing and serving a fully made meal to a hungry audience, at dinner time. The idea they would let the children run riot in the kitchen, and make their own meals, is totally anathema to many. But this is exactly what social media allows.

This deficient approach was foreshadowed by a journalistic arrogance, noted by Coleman et al., (2011):

> ‘News serves to connect the present to the future—and those entrusted with making that connection have a duty to carry the public with them… people in our focus groups often felt that the news delivered to them on a daily basis failed to explain the world as they recognised it, often leaving them feeling like outsiders looking on at a drama that even the leading performers did not expect them to understand… journalists were perceived as being compromised by their proximity to social power’. (Coleman, et al., 2011, pp.38-39)

Social networking is the next step beyond social media, when media professionals risk becoming virtually insignificant; the audience begins to speak to itself. While news providers can provide the initial substance of the conversation, quickly they can become irrelevant to what the audience does with it. This is difficult for any creative person to contemplate. Journalists,

writers and producers are used to originating ideas, discerning facts, crafting prose and sculpting news into an art form for onward dissemination. But social media and social networking give creative power to the audience. To some, this is a dangerous travesty; to others, it is an opportunity to transform from being storytellers into ‘storymakers’ (Berkowitz, 2015, slides 6-60); to light the touch paper and let the audience shape the charge of the ensuing explosion.

On 27 June 2006, Professor Jay Rosen of New York University wrote in his blog:

> ‘The people formerly known as the audience wish to inform media people of our existence, and of a shift in power that goes with the platform shift you’ve all heard about. Think of passengers on your ship who got a boat of their own. The writing readers. The viewers who picked up a camera. The formerly atomised listeners who, with modest effort, can connect with each other and gain the means to speak— to the world, as it were. Now we understand that, met with ringing statements like these, many media people want to cry out in the name of reason herself: If all would speak, who shall be left to listen? Can you at least tell us that? The people formerly known as the audience do not believe this problem—too many speakers!—is our problem’ (Rosen, 2006).

And herein lay the root of the problem facing old media as the audience shifts onto social media and social networking sites. Many in the media leadership like things just the way they are — or more accurately, the way they were. The status quo ante is in their professional and commercial interest. They do not

want to cede editorial control to the wider populace, who are less educated and less sophisticated than them (Coleman et al., 2011, p.50).

For audiences aged 16-34, whose entire adult lives have been lived in an age of digital technology, their increasing abstention from broadcast news is evidence they are demanding something different from those who determine the style, content and definition of news.

3.2 Which social media platform?

The biggest social media platforms in the United Kingdom, defined by the number of self reported active users, are Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat and Twitter, in that order (Table 3.1).

Ofcom's Media Literacy Tracker 2018 ranks the same Big Six in the same order for the general population, and for audiences aged 16-34. Whilst Facebook is the highest ranked for all ages, its audience is getting older and its overall numbers are in decline.

In 2013, 96 per cent of social media users told Ofcom they used their Facebook accounts, whereas by 2018, this number had dropped to 88 per cent. In the same period, the number of social media users who said they only used Facebook dropped from 43 per cent to 20 per cent (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Ofcom: Social media sites used, by age group, 2018

	All with a social media profile/ messaging account	Age 16-24	Age 25-34	Age 35-44	Age 45-54	Age 55-64	Age 65+
Facebook	88%	92%	90%	86%	86%	85%	89%
WhatsApp	61%	64%	68%	66%	62%	49%	33%
Instagram	38%	62%	50%	31%	31%	22%	9%
YouTube	35%	54%	43%	29%	27%	25%	14%
Snapchat	25%	59%	42%	13%	12%	4%	0%
Twitter	25%	35%	24%	25%	25%	21%	13%
LinkedIn	16%	13%	18%	19%	20%	11%	6%
Pinterest	12%	16%	16%	11%	12%	8%	5%
Google+	11%	18%	10%	10%	8%	8%	8%
Twitch	3%	9%	2%	4%	0%	1%	0%
Tumblr	3%	6%	4%	3%	1%	0%	0%
Facebook only	20%	8%	14%	20%	25%	30%	43%

Source: Ofcom Adult Media Literacy Tracker 2018

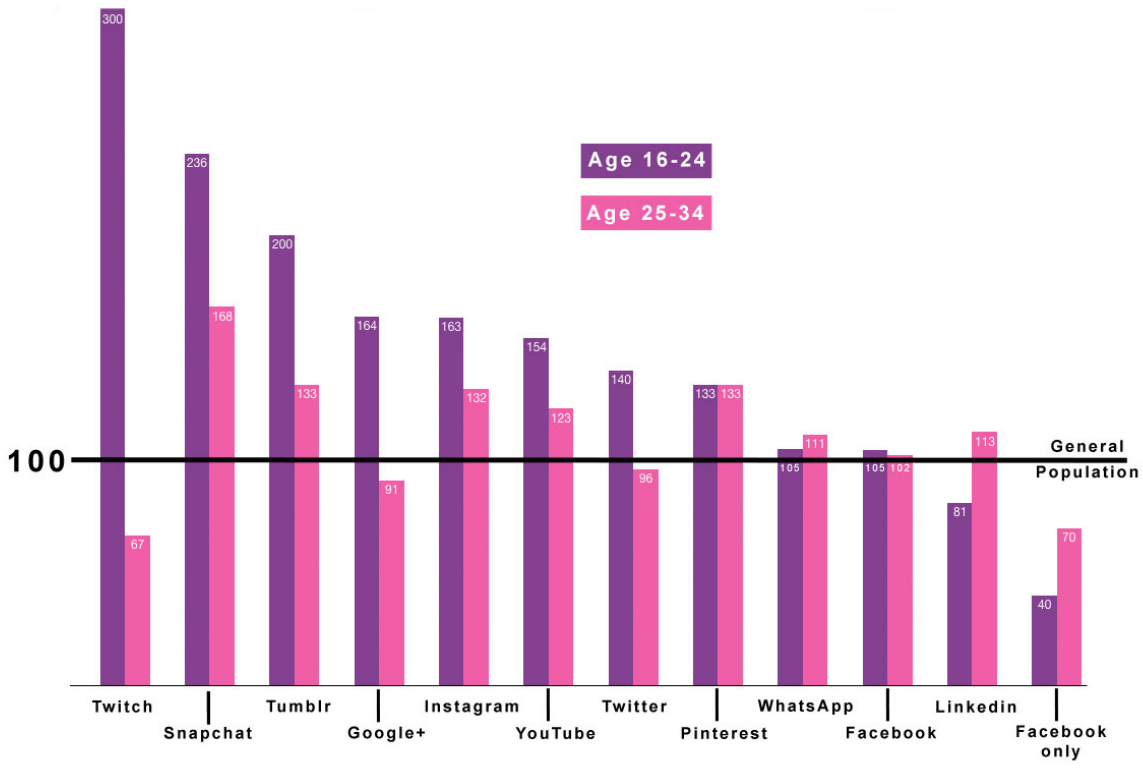
IN22. Which social media or messaging sites or apps do you have a profile or account on, that you still use? (prompted responses, multi-coded) – showing responses of 3% or more of adults in 2018 aged 16+ with a social media profile / account.

Base: All adults aged 16+ with a profile or account on a social media or messaging site/app (1247 in 2018, varies by demography).

So, Facebook is experiencing relative decline due to increasing use of other platforms by younger people. Taking the Ofcom data from Table 3.1, we can index the numbers to show the relative popularity of each platform, by age group. An index number greater than 100 shows a disproportionate percentage

of an age group with a preference for a platform, compared to the general population. An index number below 100 shows the opposite. Figure 3.3 shows the Ofcom data from Table 3.1 indexed for those aged 16-24 and those aged 25-34.

Figure 3.3. Ofcom: Social media sites used, 2018 (indexed by age group)



Source data: Ofcom Adult Media Literacy Tracker 2018. .
IN22. Which social media or messaging sites or apps do you have a profile or account on, that you still use?
Base: All adults aged 16+ with a profile or account on a social media or messaging site/app
(1247 in 2018, varies by demography).
Index Number - separately calculated by L Hawthorne from Ofcom source data,
shows percentage of age group compared to general sample population.

Twitch had the highest Index Number (300) for 16-24s. Twitch is a live video streaming service, favoured by online gamers. Its high index number means Twitch's user base contained the highest proportion — three times pro rata — of users aged 16-24.

Among 16-24s, Twitch is followed by Snapchat (Index Number: 236) and Tumblr (Index Number: 200).

The tallest (light / pink) bars in Figure 3.3 show Snapchat, Pinterest and Tumblr were the three platforms with the highest proportion of users aged 25-34. Interestingly, Twitch is at the bottom of this list for 25-34s, indicating its popularity was sharply limited to the very youngest age group

Overall, Facebook remains the most important social media platform for all age groups, but it is going out of fashion. The Ofcom data heralds a growing divide between younger adults and the rest of the population, in terms of which social media platforms they choose to use.

3.3 Social media use of children aged 5-16 years old

The generational differences are amplified when one looks at the social media choices of those aged 5-16. In a few years, these children will join their elder siblings in the 16-24 cohort, and their behaviour likely is already similar to the youngest members of this latter group.

In 'The Monitor Report 2020', research agency Childwise examined the media consumption habits of 2,167 UK children aged 5-16 years old. For these children, it found the mobile phone was the most important communications

device, surpassing usage of tablets, personal computers, games consoles and televisions. It found most children own a mobile phone by the age of 7, and they spent an average 3.4 hours per day online (Childwise, 2020).

Among those aged 7-16 years old, YouTube was the most popular website. 61 per cent of children used it every day, spending a daily average of 2.4 hours. 29 per cent of children — unprompted — said YouTube was their favourite site; followed by Snapchat (17 per cent); Instagram (17 per cent) and TikTok (10 per cent) (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Childwise: What is your favourite website or app?

What is your favourite website or app?
(Open response question to all 7-16 year olds)

	2020	2019	2018	2017
YouTube	29%	31%	29%	27%
Snapchat	17%	17%	20%	14%
Instagram	17%	13%	12%	8%
TikTok	10%	3%	2%	2%
Fortnite	5%	7%	n/a	n/a
Roblox	4%	6%	7%	2%
Minecraft	4%	3%	5%	4%
Netflix	4%	6%	2%	n/a

Source: Childwise Monitor Report(s), 2017-2020

While YouTube was pre-eminent, the Childwise data in Table 3.2 points to a looming challenge from the video-sharing app, TikTok, which tripled its favourability between 2019 and 2020. 43 per cent of children surveyed said they used it. One in ten said it was their favourite site/app.

TikTok, owned by the Chinese company, ByteDance, launched as a mobile application in 2017. It is a video sharing social network, allowing users to create and share short-form, looping videos, mostly 15 seconds in duration. Prominent genres include users lip-syncing to pop songs, dancing and performing funny stunts. The most popular video in 2019 — with 9.2 million views — featured an Indian man, Abheesh P. Dominic, winning the Guinness World Record for breaking the highest number of coconuts (122), inside one minute, with his bare hands (TikTok, 2019).

The interesting thing about TikTok for this research is it is sharply focussed on getting young people to film and edit hugely creative, often technically complex, videos. It is an exemplar of McNealy's 'age of participation' (CNET, 2005) and Berkowitz's 'storymaking' (Berkowitz, 2015) practised by 'the people formerly known as the audience' (Rosen, 2006).

TikTok's mission statement is: 'to inspire creativity and bring joy' (TikTok, n.d.). Its website claims its most popular users can go:

> '…from performing in their bedrooms to hanging out with A-listers, these creators are the trailblazers that keep TikTok ticking'. (TikTok, 2019).

Young people, whose fledgling video production talents are honed first on TikTok, have the future capacity to turn their creative skills into producing what they might define as news. Likely, this would not be on TikTok, because the platform presently is focussed on fun and music, but it could be on other platforms, including those owned by news broadcasters.

3.4 Which social media platforms are used for news?

‘The Ofcom News Consumption in the UK Report 2019’ (Ofcom, 2019a) is the UK broadcast regulator’s annual comprehensive dataset for news consumption across all major media sources and platforms. When social media users were asked which platforms they used for consuming news, the picture was different to that for general content. In 2019, Facebook was the most popular social media platform for news content, with 73 per cent of ‘All adults’, and 65 per cent of 16-24s claiming they used it for news (Table 3.3).

Usage of Facebook for news was down, and its relative position among younger audiences was also declining. Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and WhatsApp were the next most popular social media platforms for news among 16-24s. The same five platforms topped the charts for the general population, but in a markedly different order. Snapchat and Instagram were notable for the comparative difference in usage; almost double and triple the rates — respectively — among 16-24s, compared to the general adult population.

Table 3.3. Ofcom: Which social media do you use for news?

	All adults	Ages 16-24
Facebook	73%	65%
Instagram	28%	50%
Snapchat	17%	44%
Twitter	33%	43%
WhatsApp	30%	31%
Reddit	6%	12%
LinkedIn	9%	10%
Google+ *	14%	9%
Tumblr	2%	4%
Viber	2%	2%
Other social media platform	2%	2%

Source: Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2019

Question: D7a. Thinking specifically about social media (on any device), which of the following do you use for news nowadays?

Base: All using social media for news – Total=2331, 16-24=620,

***** NB: Ofcom thinks some respondents misinterpreted what Google+ is.

3.5 How do users access news on social media?

Notably, when people access news on social media, increasingly they were not getting news directly from news organisations (Table 3.4). Only 30 per cent of adults got their news in this way, and the trend away from news organisations was greatest among 16-24s, among whom, just 22 per cent said they ‘mostly get news directly from news organisations' websites/apps’. The majority of this age group (56 per cent) said they ‘mostly get news from social media posts’. This included stories that were ‘trending’ on social media, and stories posted or shared by friends, family and other people users followed.

Table 3.4. Ofcom: Routes to news stories on social media/online

	All adults	Ages 16-24
Mostly get news from social media posts	41%	56%
Get news equally from social media posts and from news organisations' websites/apps	25%	18%
Mostly get news directly from news organisations' websites/apps	30%	22%
Don’t know	5%	4%

Source: Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2019
Question: D15. And if you had to choose, which ONE of the following would you say is closest to the way you find out about news when you’re online?
Base: All using social media for news – Total=2331, Male=966, Female=1361, 16-24=620, 65+=142, ABC1=1435, C2DE=887, Minority ethnic=496, White=1825 Green shading indicates significant differences between groups.

3.6 Other online sources of news

The divergence in news consumption habits between the young and the old was less stark on websites and mobile apps than it was on social media. While 'all adults' were most likely to use websites and apps belonging to TV channels and radio companies (24 per cent), the most common route for 16-24s was to go to a search engine to look for news (21 per cent) (Table 3.5).

Table 3.5. Ofcom: Which of the following do you use for news?

	All adults	Ages 16-24
Search engines	**19%**	21%
Websites/apps of TV and radio companies	**24%**	21%
Websites/apps of newspapers	**19%**	17%
Websites/apps of online news organisations	**12%**	16%
Websites/apps of news aggregation sites	**12%**	13%
Websites/apps of news magazines	**6%**	9%
Blogs	**2%**	2%

Source: Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2019
Question: C2. Which of the following do you use to get news?
Base: All adults 16+ 2019 - Total=4691, Male=2146, Female=2538, 16-24=805, 65+=903, ABC1=2743, C2DE=1939, Minority ethnic=680, White=3998 Green shading indicates significant differences between groups

3.7 Specific news websites and apps used

Ofcom found the most popular website/app for news among 16-24s was the Google search engine, used by 65 per cent of them (Table 3.6), beating into second place the BBC website/app (64 per cent), which was top for 'all adults'. In third place was YouTube (36 per cent). Significantly, younger people used YouTube, BuzzFeed and LADbible for news, at more than double the rate of the general population.

Table 3.6. Ofcom: Which websites/apps do you use for news?

	All adults	Ages 16-24
Google (search engine)	51%	65%
BBC website/app	65%	64%
YouTube website/app	15%	36%
Guardian/Observer website/app	18%	24%
BuzzFeed website/app	9%	22%
Sky News website/app	20%	20%
The Daily Mail website/app	17%	20%
LADbible website/app	6%	19%
Google News (news aggregator)	13%	12%
The Independent website/app	8%	12%

Source: Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2019
Question: D8a. Thinking specifically about the internet, which of the following do you use for news nowadays?
Base: All using other internet for news 2019 - Total=1773, Male=882, Female=889, 16-24=307, 65+=271, ABC1=1241, C2DE=527, Minority ethnic=310, White=1455
Green shading indicates significant differences between groups. Only sources with an incidence of 5%+ in 2019 are shown.
**ITV/ITN – only includes mentions of ITV/ITN specifically, does not include mentions of STV or UTV

3.8 Gateways to news

When asked which gateway to news was used ‘often or most times’, the majority of ‘all adults’ (58 per cent) said they ‘go directly to a website/app of a news provider’ (Table 3.7). Only a minority — but still a plurality — of 16-24s said they do this (46 per cent). Others in this age group said they ‘go to a search engine and search for a news story’ (38 per cent), or to a news aggregator (27 per cent).

Table 3.7. Ofcom: Gateways to online news and frequency of use

Percentage using ‘often or most’ times	All Adults	Ages 16-24
Go directly to a website/app of a news provider	58%	46%
Go to a search engine and search for a news story	32%	38%
Go directly to a website/app that brings together news from different news providers	27%	32%

Source: Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2019
Question: D14. How often, if at all, you do each of the following when you want to get news?
Base: All using other internet for news - Total=1773, Male=882, Female=889, 16-24=307, 65+=271, ABC1=1241, C2DE=527, Minority ethnic=310, White=1455 Green shading indicates significant differences between groups

3.9 Single most important media for news

When asked which was their single most important media platform for news (Table 3.8), the top choice for ‘all adults’ was ‘Any TV’ (47 per cent); whereas only 23 per cent of 16-24s chose this; fewer than half the rate for the general population. Instead, 16-24s chose ‘social media’ (43 per cent) as their most important platform for news, whereas only 16 per cent of ‘all adults’ made the same choice. ‘Any TV’ came in second place for 16-24s followed by ‘any other Internet’.

When asked about their single most important media brand for news, rather than platform, the top choice for ‘all adults’ was BBC One (24 per cent); for 16-24s, it was Facebook (17 per cent), with BBC One in a distant second place (10 per cent), and Twitter in third place (8 per cent). However, all BBC channel brands collectively — BBC One, BBC website / app, BBC News Channel and BBC Radio 4 — comprised the single most important news source for ‘all adults’ (37 per cent) and for 16-24s (20 per cent); still with a significant disparity revealed between age-groups.

Across all platforms and sub-brands, the BBC was approximately half as important a news source to 16-24s as it was for ‘all adults’; the gap was due largely to declining use of television as a platform among young people, and the increased use of social media.

Table 3.8. Ofcom: Single most important source of news

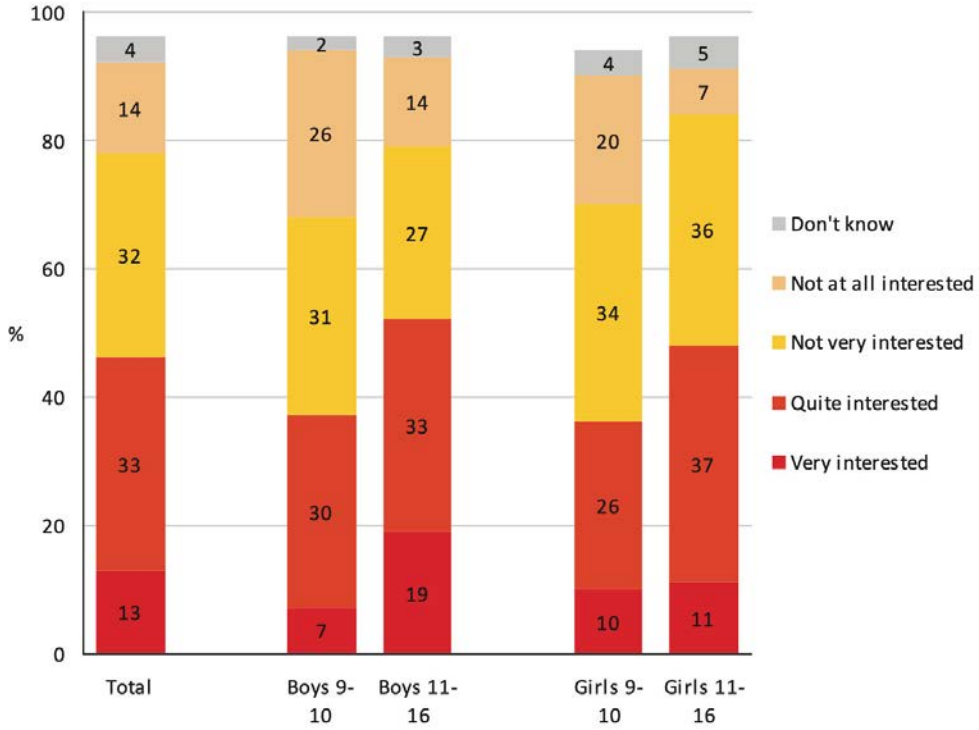
Which is your single most important source for news?		
	All Adults	**Ages 16-24**
Media platform:		
Any social media	16%	43%
Any TV	47%	23%
Any other Internet	13%	14%
Any radio	8%	5%
Any newspaper	7%	3%
Any magazine	0%	0%
Media brand:		
Facebook	8%	17%
BBC One	24%	10%
Twitter	3%	8%
BBC website / app	6%	6%
ITV/ITV WALES/UTV/STV	11%	5%
Sky News Channel	5%	3%
BBC News Channel	5%	3%
BBC Radio 4	2%	1%
Daily Mail / Mail on Sunday (print or website/ app)	2%	1%
The Guardian / Observer (print or website / app)	2%	1%

Source: Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2019
Question: E1a. Looking at all the sources of news you have just said that you use, which one is most important to you?
Base: All adults 16+ specifying at least one source for news 2019 - Total=4492, Male=2057, Female=2428, 16-24=748, 65+=883, ABC1=2659, C2DE=1824, Minority ethnic=659, White=3820
Green shading indicates significant differences between groups. Only sources with an incidence of 2%+ in 2019 are shown.

3.10 News consumption by children aged 11-16 years old

Again, news consumption by children just below 16 years old likely is indicative of patterns among younger members of the 16-24 cohort. Among those aged 11-16, Childwise (2017) found 19 per cent of boys claimed to be ‘very interested’ in current affairs, and 33 per cent were ‘quite interested’; it was 11 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively, for girls (Figure 3.4). These numbers are slightly lower than those found by Ofcom in its survey of 12-15 year olds, where 19 per cent of both sexes were ‘very interested’ and 40 per cent were ‘quite interested’ (Ofcom 2019a, p. 103). The Childwise data shows an unexplained, yet significant disparity among those ‘very interested’ in current affairs between boys and girls (11-16); boys representing 173 per cent the number of girls.

Figure 3.4. Childwise: Interest in current affairs



Base: All aged 9-16 (5.8m / unwtd 771)
Source: Childwise Monitor Report, 2017.

Among children with a lack of interest in current affairs, some reasons given to Childwise are selectively quoted in Text Box 3.2. Common complaints included how negative most news is, and how little relevance it has to their lives. Prominent words included ‘depressing’, ‘bad’, ‘sad’, ‘blown out of proportion’, ‘it scares me’ and ‘it’s all about war’. Ofcom found similar expressions of discomfiture among 12-15 year olds who were disinterested in news, including the words ‘too boring’ (41 per cent), ‘not relevant to people my age’ (19 per cent), and ‘too upsetting’ (15 per cent) (Ofcom, 2019a, p.103).

Text Box 3.2. Childwise: Selective quotes from children disinterested in news and current affairs

‘I don’t really care and it doesn’t affect my life’. [Girl aged 12]

‘The news is boring the way they talk and act is not exciting or appealing’. [Girl aged 14]

’90% of it is blown out of proportion and depressing’. [Boy aged 14]

‘It’s always bad and sad’. [Girl aged 15]

‘It's very negative, if something ‘big’ happens then I hear it from my teachers, friends, family or other means through the social media’. [Girl aged 16]

‘It is all about war, so I don't really follow it’. [Boy, 16 years old]

Source: Childwise Monitor Report, 2017.

3.11 Summary

Beginning with an attempt to define news, I offer a new visual taxonomy of news using the RGB spectrum of light — with red representing the ‘new’; green representing things that are ‘interesting to the public’, and blue for matters ‘in the public interest’ (Figure 3.2). The seven resulting colours show: ‘tabloid news’, ‘serious news’, ‘trivial information’, ‘a splash’, ‘old serious news’, ‘old tabloid news’, and ‘history’.

The definition of news is fiercely debated, with some denying tabloid news falls within a definition of worthwhile news. Younger consumers are estranged from the journalistic and political classes, and leave the role of defining news to these older, elite actors, while deferentially they attribute their own content choices as ‘not real news’ (Sveningsson, 2015; Coleman et al., 2011).

The difference between social media and social networks is defined, where the key difference is the former offers a means for media companies to interact with consumers, whereas the latter offers a platform for consumer to consumer conversations.

The increased potential within social media for co-creation, storymaking (Berkowitz, 2011) and participation from ‘the people formerly known as the audience’ (Rosen, 2006) is explored; all of which threaten to disrupt the role of traditional news storytellers.

3.12 Brief conclusions arising from industry data

Overall, there is a significant divergence in news consumption behaviour between the young and the old. 16-34s are abandoning television especially,

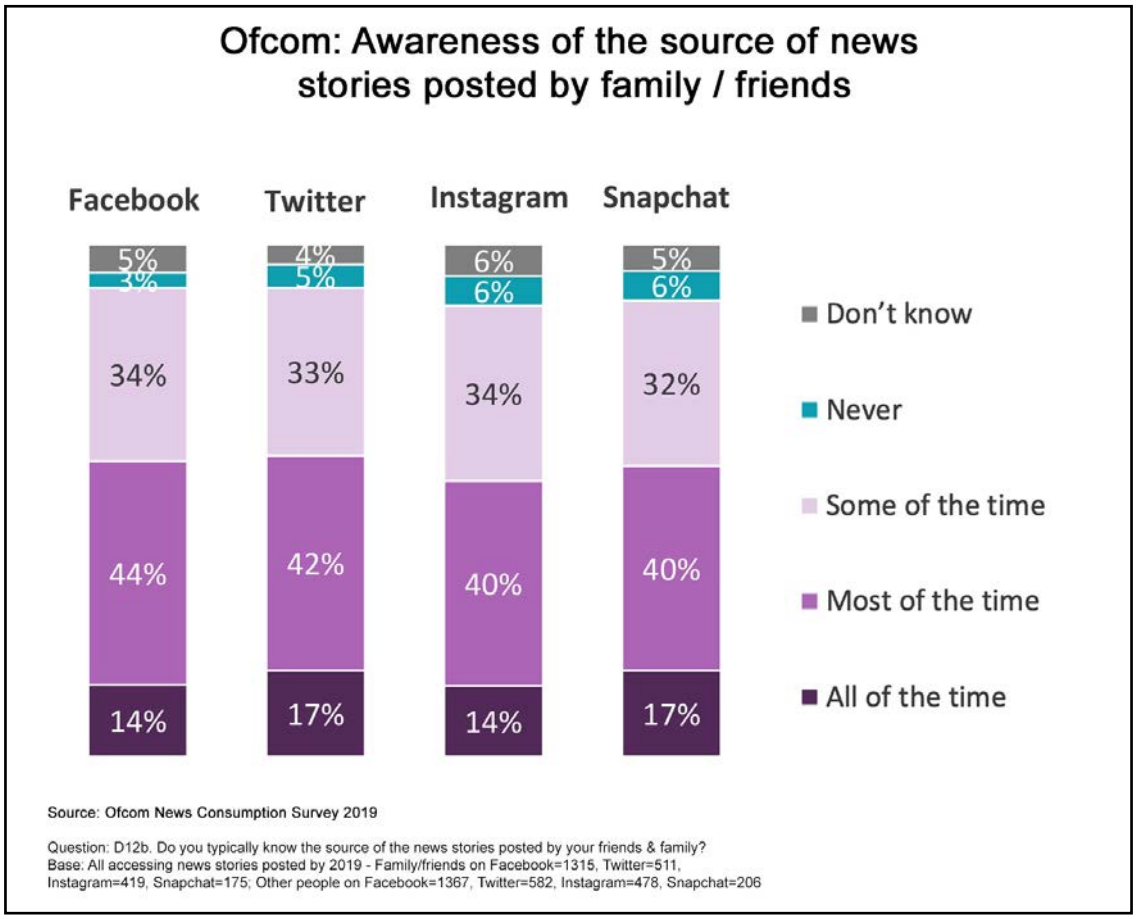
and shifting to the Internet and social media, at a much greater rate than the general population. Also, they are using different media channels, brands and pathways to news. Whilst Facebook remains the main social media platform for news, its age profile is rising and Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter and YouTube are becoming more appealing to younger adults (Table 3.3).

Increasingly, young adults do not get their news directly from news organisations; they get it vicariously through search engines, news aggregators, and social media postings. When they cite Facebook, Google, or a friend as their source of news, more often than not, the ultimate source is a traditional mainstream news organisation (Domingo, Masip and Costera Meijer, 2015, p.53).

Only 54-59 per cent of social media users, who viewed news posted by family and friends, knew the source of the stories ‘most’ or ‘all of the time’ (Figure 3.5); meaning almost half the time, people likely cannot gauge the trustworthiness of the news provider.

Worse still, when news came from ‘other people you follow’, a minority of Facebook users claimed to know the source ‘most of the time’ (37 per cent) or ‘all of the time’ (10 per cent) (Figure 3.5) (Ofcom 2019a, p.52).

Figure 3.5. Ofcom: Awareness of the source of news stories posted on social media by family and friends



From the news suppliers' perspective, this picture poses a serious threat to the value of their brands, if not their very existence. Access to their content is being mediated by third parties — technology platforms directly, and human conduits — and approximately half the audience did not know, or maybe care, who or what was the ultimate news source.

Chapter 4
Incidental News Exposure

4.0 Incidental news exposure

The term ‘incidental news exposure’ — alternatively, ‘incidental news consumption’ — describes how social media users stumble across news stories while planning events, catching up with friends, or browsing other, usually entertainment-related, content (Fletcher and Nielsen, 2017, p.2451).

Ofcom defined ‘incidental consumption’ as:

> ‘…accidentally coming across news while doing something else, usually through social media, word of mouth or notification… At these times, people generally… were on these platforms to be entertained or to catch up with friends, rather than actively to seek news’. (Figure 2.1) (Ofcom, 2019b, p.26).

Because 43 per cent of 16-24s say social media is their single most important source for news (Table 3.8) (Ofcom, 2019a, p.71), the issue of incidental news exposure is most marked among young adults. Ofcom found the trait also was associated with lower socio-economic groups, and accessing news through a news aggregator, such as Apple News, Google News or Yahoo News, rather than directly via a news producer. This also meant the news tended to be personalised, as this is a common feature of news aggregators; less so for news broadcasters’ sites and mobile apps. (Ofcom, 2019b, pp.27-28).

In other words, news stories will appear in a newsfeed, triggered by the algorithm of the social media platform. Or a user might see their name is ‘tagged’ by a friend in a post, or a story is ‘shared’ directly with them. The resulting news content, to which users are exposed is highly dependent on the people in their personal social network, as well as their interests and online activity (Karlsen, 2015, p.302).

Ofcom wrote:

> ‘When people consumed news incidentally, however, they did it in a more passive way. On social media, people would rarely look beyond the headline. When they did click on articles accessed through news aggregators or social media, we saw a similar pattern, with people reading only the first few paragraphs before returning to their social feed’. (Ofcom 2019b, p.27)

And in 2018, a market research company, Revealing Reality concluded:

> ‘The design and functionality of content delivered via smartphones seemed to encourage passive news consumption, encouraging scrolling, swiping and watching behaviours rather than proactive searching and exploration’. (Revealing Reality, 2018, p.5).

For Boczkowski, Mitchelstein and Matassi (2018) and Siles and Boczkowski (2012), incidental news consumption occurs at the intersection of content and technology, for which the authors adopt a ‘texto-material’ perspective, influenced by ‘practice theory’, based on the works of Giddens (1979). Instead

of looking at people through theories of ‘homo economicus’, where people are said to act rationally according to their needs, or ‘homo sociologicus’, where they act according to social norms, practice theory attributes mixed motives and assumes a dialogue between the social and the individualistic. Consequently, when looking at news consumption on social media, the authors concluded:

> ‘Incidental news consumption is not necessarily—and not primarily—about the news, but about exercising sociability and passing time’. (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2018, p.3533).

They argued incidental exposure was neither new nor unique to social media; it existed with conventional media:

> ‘From perusing the headlines of a publication while waiting in line to pay at the supermarket, to briefly watching a story on display at an electronics store while walking down the street’. (Ibid., 3524).

The key difference between the past and the present was how:

> ‘…consuming news incidentally on social media has moved from the periphery to the centre of the contemporary repertoire of online information practices, in particular among young people’. (Ibid., 3524).

4.1 Intentionality

The word ‘incidental’ describes both the accidental — rather than intentional — nature of the encounter; also the superficial way the information might skate

across the surface of the user's consciousness, rather than penetrating deeply into it.

Some researchers argue incidental news exposure is pushing many users into a passive role, where they do not feel a need to take active steps to look for news, such as going out to buy a newspaper, or going to a news website, or making an appointment to view a television news bulletin. Instead, they rely on the social media platform to do all the work. This is called: 'the news finds me perception' (Gil de Zúnīga, Weeks & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017).

From my own taxonomy (Table 2.2), this implies a move towards Promiscuous behaviour and away from Customary and Diligent. Put another way:

> 'In an age of smart phones and social media, young people don't follow the news, as much as it follows them'. (Madden, Lenhart & Fontaine, 2017, p.4).

Meanwhile, Fletcher and Nielsen (2017) found people could not be categorised simply into two camps of either incidental or intentional news consumers. Instead, they found social media users engage in both forms, often on the same day. Others dispute whether this kind of news exposure, albeit unstructured, really can be classed as unintentional:

> 'There seems to be a deliberate choice to keep up with current affairs via SNSs [social networking sites], though this is not always conducted in a systematic way'. (Bergström & Belfrage, 2018, p.591)

The argument is: young users know they will be exposed to news on social media; in fact, they cite social media as their primary platform for news. So, it is probable they have an expectation ‘the news will find me’ and this is a deliberate action, rather than an unintentional side effect.

In their study of 44 Swedish high school students aged 16-19, Bergström and Belfrage (2018) noted young people were aware if they clicked stories, the social media algorithms were designed to feed more stories on the same topic. This fore-knowledge diminished the claim the resultant news exposure was incidental, because it resulted from conscious choices. One student told the Swedish researchers:

> ‘In one way it’s planned, on Facebook, for example, if you have clicked on a news article, then it’s like they know you want that kind of news, and… [more news like that] will keep appearing’. (Bergström & Belfrage, 2018, p.591).

4.2 Information overload

One theory explaining the emergence of incidental exposure is it is due to the sheer volume of news information to which users are exposed on social media. Hermida (2010) introduced the term ‘ambient journalism’ to refer to a pervasive system, in which, we are always connected to a constant barrage of information.

Lee, Kim and Koh (2016) used the term ‘information overload’ to refer to the negative psychological effect of too much information being available for people efficiently to navigate. They split information overload into two genres: ‘general

information overload' (GIO) and ‘news information overload’ (NIO). NIO is associated with the Internet and the rise of social media. Before these, the quantity of news to which the public likely were exposed was limited to a few broadcasts on television and radio, and the purchase of a daily newspaper. But now, social media floods our mobile phones with information from every television station, radio station and newspaper in the world.

The authors wrote:

> ‘This change in news media environment brought information surplus, namely a glut of information facilitated by expansion of the Internet’s distribution capacity. People often experience inconvenience during the process of selecting news information that overflows in their daily lives’. (Lee, Kim & Koh, 2016, p.1).

They found the more interested a person was in the news, the greater was the likelihood of periodic feelings of NIO. This group had a variety of responses; the most common was psychologically to switch off.

> ‘The perception of information overload leads to a higher level of fatigue felt by news consumers. As consumers experience fatigue, they tend to avoid news materials both intentionally and unintentionally’. (Lee, Kim & Koh, 2016, p.3).

Boczkowski et al., (2018) observed similar, but paradoxical, responses in a study on young Argentines, implying incidental consumption did not always mean less news was being consumed:

> ‘Incidental news consumption on social media sometimes can deter consumers from visiting news websites, but on other occasions, it acts as an incentive to do this’. (Ibid., 3532).

4.3 Digital Divide

The main concern voiced about incidental news exposure was it may be contributing to a gulf in news consumption between the ‘information rich’ and the ‘information poor’ — what Norris (2001) referred to as the *Digital Divide.*

It is not just that there are some people more interested in news than others; that is to be expected. It is a belief incidental exposure on social media prevents actively those with less interest in the news from consuming it elsewhere, resulting in lower news-intake than there otherwise would be. This is the theory of ‘displacement’, as opposed to the rival theory of media ‘complementarity’, in which exposure on one platform encourages yet more exposure on another (Dutta-Bergman, 2004).

Tewksbury, Weaver and Maddex (2001, pp.542-543) found evidence incidental exposure was high for those already with a high level of interest in news, and for those who actively seek news. This implies a circular relationship between Promiscuous and Diligent behaviour (Table 2.2). This finding was echoed by Bode (2015, pp.19-20).

In his study of social media use in Latvia, Bucholtz (2015) concluded the picture was more nuanced than a simple binary choice. He found some displacement among the most prolific social media users, but if they used social media for work, the outcome leant towards complementarity.

Meanwhile, Ofcom expressed concern incidental news consumption was leading to sections of society — that rely on social media for their news — not being adequately informed about social issues (Ofcom 2019b, pp.26-29).

Kümpel (2018) referred to this mixture of displacement and complementarity as the ‘Matthew Effect’, a term coined by the American sociologist, Robert K. Merton (Merton, 1974). This is where people, already with a high degree of interest in news, increase their engagement with news via social media, because they are being fed more and more stories. Whereas those with a low degree of interest in news increasingly have passive and superficial encounters with news, because social media actively reduces their (otherwise more engaged) consumption of news via traditional channels.

The Matthew Effect is so called because it refers to the Parable of the Talents in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, verse 29, which reads:

> ‘For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath’.

Kümpel (2018) found the Matthew Effect could be counteracted through the process by which news stories arrive in users’ social media feeds. She wrote:

> ‘A New York Times post linking to an article about climate change might not instantly captivate a Facebook user, while the same post shared by her best friend can easily motivate her to read the full story’. (Kümpel, 2018, p.2).

This stunningly simple observation identifies both the problem and solution for news providers. Merely doing more of the same — pumping out content in an endless monologue — is futile. Instead, as I conclude later in this chapter, new strategies are needed to utilise personal networks to attract young audiences.

4.4 Engagement

Engagement often is defined as the sum of actions taken, on encountering a social media post. This includes clicks to play video, clicks to read stories, to like, share and comment. Also, it can include time spent watching videos, both absolute time, and time as a percentage of overall video duration.

Ofcom's findings on engagement with news posted on social media support Kümpel's thesis (Table 4.1). It found stories referred by family and friends led to the greatest level of comments, shares and clicks. 'Trending' news stories were the second most likely route leading to high engagement. Stories posted directly by news organisations were in third place; whereas the lowest level of engagement was for stories shared by 'other people you follow'. The findings differed slightly for each social media platform, but the pattern was the same.

Table 4.1. Ofcom: Engagement with news content on social media platforms on referral of stories from different sources

Platform	Action	News stories from friends and family	News organisations	Trending News	News stories from other people you follow
Facebook	Comment	23%	16%	14%	16%
	Share	15%	16%	14%	11%
	Click	61%	62%	66%	49%
	Total	**99%**	**94%**	**94%**	**76%**
Twitter	Comment	26%	24%	20%	24%
	Share	23%	25%	22%	23%
	Click	55%	63%	69%	59%
	Total	**104%**	**112%**	**111%**	**106%**
Instagram	Comment	24%	19%	18%	20%
	Share	18%	15%	15%	14%
	Click	57%	53%	62%	48%
	Total	**99%**	**87%**	**95%**	**82%**
Snapchat	Comment	28%	15%	10%	18%
	Share	19%	12%	11%	16%
	Click	56%	56%	71%	45%
	Total	**103%**	**83%**	**92%**	**79%**

Source: Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2019
Question: D11 [actions taken on each social media platform]
(Selective Ofcom data extracted by Leon Hawthorne)
Base: All accessing news from each source, 2019

When social media users encountered news stories incidentally, Ofcom found the engagement was momentary and superficial.

> ‘This meant they typically spent less than a minute on each item of news content consumed on their device if they came to it from social media. Importantly, when people consumed news in this way, they were much less aware of the source of the story they were reading or watching’. (Ofcom, 2019b, p.27).

Boczkowski, Mitchelstein and Matassi (2018) noted one reason incidental news consumption was so fleeting was because the news content is consumed at times when the user is doing something else. For them, the issue of spatio-temporality (time and place) is a significant factor in understanding incidental consumption, along with routine and habit. One interviewee told them:

> ‘I’m always checking on my cellphone, but I can’t look at anything in depth because I’m working or at school, so I can’t sit down and read something’. (Ibid., 3532).

Another interviewee, when asked how much time she spent reading her last news story, replied:

> ‘Well, it had 150 characters, so it was quick [laughs]!’ (Ibid., 3532).

Boczkowski, Mitchelstein and Matassi (2018, p.3532) added:

> ‘The reading practices tied to incidental news consumption tend to be partial and brief. They are partial because most of our interviewees say

> they tend to focus mostly on headlines, accompanying images, and leads. Lucila…commented that: ‘I mostly do a headline scan. And later on, if something interests me a lot, I visit [the respective website]”.

Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink (2014) called this behaviour ‘news snacking’, which serves primarily to give users a brief overview of what is happening in the world, while eating up little of their time.

> ‘Snacking is not about pursuing in-depth knowledge or developed opinions, but about diversion: users consume bits and pieces of information in a relaxed, easy-going fashion to gain a sense of what is going on’. (Ibid., 670).

4.5 Engagement decisions of social media users and Kümpel

In her 2018 study of German Facebook users, Kümpel (2018) explored what facilitates the transition from incidental exposure to greater engagement with news stories. She referred to ‘engagement decisions’ i.e. the ‘decision to attentively read an encountered news article’, for which she identified five characteristics:

(1) the perceived characteristics of the news provider;

(2) personal characteristics and traits of the exposed user (‘news receiver’);

(3) characteristics of the news recommendation;

(4) characteristics of the news content;

(5) characteristics of the news curator (i.e., the recommending friend).

4.5.1 Perceived characteristics of the news provider

Kümpel's 'characteristics of the news provider' relate principally to the news brand's perceived quality and credibility. This includes whether the brand is considered political biassed. Although relevant, Kümpel found social media users' perceptions of the news provider were the least important of all factors in deciding whether to engage with a story.

Williams (2012) found people pay more attention to stories if they have a high level of trust in the reporter and the media organisation for which the reporter works. However, Ofcom found trust in social media itself is very low (Table 4.2). Only 38 per cent of users agreed with the statement: 'information received on social media is trustworthy'. All other media scored higher — magazines (82 per cent), television (71 per cent), radio (67 per cent), newspapers (66 per cent) and other Internet (58 per cent) (Ofcom, 2019a, p.72).

Facebook users gave the platform — the one they use most for news — the lowest score for trustworthiness (35 per cent) of the four main social media platforms. This compared with scores ranging from 62 to 76 per cent for the mainstream broadcasters. The main appeal of social media was: 'it is important to me personally' (58 per cent), and 'it offers a range of opinions' (56 per cent).

Table 4.2. Ofcom: Trustworthiness and other attributes of different sources of news

Media	Is trustworthy	Is important to me personally	Offers a range of opinions
BBC	71%	76%	76%
ITV	74%	70%	70%
Channel 4	71%	60%	60%
Sky News	76%	73%	73%
Channel 5	62%	57%	57%
Magazines	82%	75%	79%
Television	71%	70%	71%
Radio	67%	63%	60%
Newspapers (print-only)	66%	65%	64%
Other Internet	58%	60%	56%
Social media	38%	58%	56%
Twitter	43%	63%	65%
Snapchat	42%	56%	43%
Instagram	39%	57%	52%
Facebook	35%	57%	55%

Source: Ofcom News Consumption Survey 2019
Question: E2. How important is <BRAND> as a source of news to you personally? E3. And to what extent do you think the following statements apply to <BRAND> as news source? Answer using a scale of 1 to 10
Base: All using each source for news at least weekly.

4.5.2 Personal characteristics and traits of the news receiver

Kümpel's 'characteristics of the news receiver' relate primarily to personality traits of the social media user, independent of the source, or type of news. One characteristic is the degree to which the user felt a duty to stay informed.

For people with low levels of interest in the news and high levels of interest in entertainment content — 'Disconnected' (Table 2.2) — there are contradictory findings on the impact of incidental exposure. News consumption generally was found to increase; however while Valeriani & Vaccari (2016) found also a resultant increase in political participation among this group, Kim, Chen and de Zúnīga (2013) found the opposite result.

Another important characteristic is fear of missing out ('FoMO'), the feeling everybody else might be talking about some story, about which you know nothing; therefore you risk being outside the information loop.

> 'Many individuals were so concerned at the idea of missing something they perceived as important that they took time-consuming measures to ensure they viewed all news that was presented to them. Some younger respondents opened their apps specifically to tap quickly through news and scroll through newsfeeds, in order to make 'unread notification' symbols disappear — described by one individual as 'clearing'… 'I do feel a pressure to keep up with the news… It's a feeling of being out of the loop'. Patrick, 24'. (Revealing Reality, 2018, p.34).

4.5.3 Characteristics of the news recommendation

Kümpel's 'characteristics of the news recommendation' relate to how the user comes across the story; whether it is by way of a personal message or a publicly visible post. A direct and personal method of sharing leads recipients to feel highly motivated, even obligated to engage. And if a friend has 'tagged' the user in a Facebook comment, meaning their name appears in a public forum, Kümpel found young Germans felt it was rude not to read and comment on the post. Grinberg et al. (2017) reinforced this point, finding users felt social pressure to comment on posts if members of their social group were expecting a response.

4.5.4 Characteristics of the news content

Kümpel's 'characteristics of the news content' relate to whether the user feels the story is interesting or relevant to them; both the substance of the story and the style in which it is presented. The latter is a reference to the emotional and rhetorical techniques of clickbait, which tease a story and breed a sense of anticipation and wonder.

Kümpel concluded:

> 'While clickbait elements undoubtedly lead the participants to linger on a news post longer, actual engagement seems to be prompted by genuine interest (instead of the urge to satisfy curiosity). The generic motives 'interest' or 'relevance' emerge, primarily, from a perceived personal relevance'. (Ibid., 12).

Kümpel found the better was the personalisation and targeting of stories to fit the interests of users, the higher was the engagement with stories, even if encountered incidentally.

In January 2020, BBC News announced it was investing in greater personalisation of its digital services (BBC, 2020a); presumably, it was doing this for this very reason — to drive up engagement.

It may come as no great surprise that ‘interest’ and ‘relevance’ are key factors for users choosing to engage with news content. This echoes Uses and Gratifications Theory, advocated by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973), in which the purpose of media consumption is to satisfy basic human psychological needs. This was simplified by Stafford, Stafford and Schkade (2004) into three categories:

(i) content gratification — the need to be informed, educated and entertained, which tallies with Kümpel’s ‘interest’ and ‘relevance’;

(ii) process gratification — the apparent joy of the physical process of browsing and navigating content;

(iii) social gratification — interacting with others and bonding with group members.

Whilst the first two forms of gratification existed in old media, social gratification was considered a new and Internet-specific form, made possible by social media and the digital age. This theory is consistent with the finding that

incidental consumption is not motivated primarily by the content itself, but by the act of socialising (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2018, p.3533).

4.5.5 Characteristics of the news curator

We have seen in the Ofcom data (Table 4.1) how ‘friends and family’ are the most powerful curators of news content, in terms of paths leading to the highest levels of engagement. Kümpel (2018, p.4) described this as ‘social curation’, the process of relying on one’s human social network to customise news stories for us.

Turcotte et al., (2015, p.521) identified a: ‘peer-to-peer process of digital news exposure’ to describe how news first reaches one person, who shares it with another on social media. Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet (1948) called this a ‘two-step flow of communication'. The first step is where the professional newsmakers and journalists publish the news. Initially, this reaches the most avid news consumers — mostly those displaying ‘Diligent’ behaviour (Table 2.2). The second step is where these ‘opinion leaders' filter the news, add commentary and context, and relay it to others in their personal network, who are less engaged with news. They label this latter group ‘opinion followers’.

4.6 Opinion leaders and opinion followers

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955, p.32) found ‘opinion followers’ were more likely to be influenced by interpersonal communications than by direct receipt of information from a news source, precisely because they trusted the interpretation given to the information, and the leadership provided by the ‘opinion leaders’ in their immediate network.

Lazarsfeld's original fieldwork examined why people voted the way they did during the US presidential election in 1940. The question arises whether this dichotomy between 'opinion leaders' and 'opinion followers' is still relevant today, and whether it explains why engagement is so high for posts shared by friends and family on social media.

There is much research (Choi, 2015; Hermida et al., 2012; Karlsen, 2015) to support the continued existence of 'opinion leaders'. Bergström and Belfrage (2018) interviewed Swedish students aged 16-25, who agreed they had 'opinion leaders' among their friends on social media. A selection of their respondents' comments is in Text Box 4.1.

Text Box 4.1. Bergström and Belfrage: Respondents' comments on 'opinion leaders'

'They ['opinion leaders'] are very important to me, since I have many…who are interested in politics. I usually read what they think and say. What plans they have, what they want, what they are going to do, it's important. I learn things'.

'It's good; I get information I would have missed'.

'They have special knowledge, you can trust them'.

'If a friend has shared something I check it out, and then I continue to the original source to see that it is correct. It's like, I get to know about it through a friend, and then I go further'.

Source: Bergström & Belfrage (2018, pp.592-593).

Turcotte et al. (2015) also identified the importance of ‘opinion leaders’ to young social media users. They constructed an experiment with 364 undergraduates, who agreed for their Facebook accounts to be manipulated. Half received a story, apparently from a local newspaper and apparently ‘shared’ by one of their real friends, with a message reading: ‘People should pay more attention to this kind of thing’. The other half of the students received just a link in their newsfeed, with no sharer and no message.

The result was: more people who received the share recommendation from a friend clicked on the story. If the sharer was perceived to be an ‘opinion leader’, the recipient also was more likely to trust the media outlet that was the apparent news source, and engage further with it. They trusted the news source more because the recommendation came from a trusted friend. The same story coming directly from the news source was not as trustworthy as when it came from a friend. However, if the friend was not considered an ‘opinion leader’, the effect was the inverse, namely they trusted the news source less (Turcotte et al., 2015).

Mutz and Young (2011) offered a simple, practical explanation for why young people engage more with stories recommended by friends and family, which squares with Lee, Kim and Koh’s (2016) notion of information overload:

> ‘When news consumers confront the excessive choices of today’s media environment, one extremely important way they decide what to pay attention to is through recommendations that reach them through their online social networks’. (Mutz & Young, 2011, p.1038).

4.7 Summary of incidental exposure

Incidental news exposure is exposure to news content while doing something else, such as browsing through a social media account, or looking at entertainment content. Access to news content is secondary, or even tertiary, to the original intent of the consumer. For this reason, engagement with the content tends to be fleeting and superficial (Ofcom, 2019b, p.29); albeit a diet of constant ‘news snacking’ (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2014) likely results in users encountering more news from more diverse sources than they would otherwise:

> ‘…we find that social media use is in fact significantly related to increased news use, even among those who come across news on social media while doing other things’. (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017, pp. 2461-2462).

Incidental news exposure is not a new phenomenon. It existed in the analog age, but the ubiquity of mobile phones and the efficiency of social media has increased its prevalence, especially among 16-34s (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2018).

Consumers cannot be classified simply into two camps of incidental and intentional news consumers. Much incidental consumption is intentional, because young users know how social media platforms are programmed to feed them news content (Bergström and Belfrage, 2018).

The prevalence of incidental news exposure has been aided by the perception there is too much news content available — ‘news information overload’ (Lee,

Kim & Koh, 2016) or ‘ambient journalism’ (Hermida et al., 2012) — where users feel always connected to news, thus they do not need to search for it; the news will find them (Gil de Zúnīga, Weeks & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017).

There is evidence both ways on whether incidental news exposure leads to ‘complementarity’, where a brief exposure to a story on social media inspires additional engagement on other media platforms; or whether it leads to ‘displacement’, where less news content on other platforms is consumed. (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Dutta-Bergman, 2004).

Those who find evidence of displacement fear incidental exposure leads to a ‘Digital Divide’ (Norris, 2001) between the ‘information rich’ and the ‘information poor’, where the ‘poor’ get ‘poorer’ via the ‘Matthew Effect’ (Merton, 1974).

Kümpel (2018) listed a number of characteristics, offering a roadmap for converting incidental exposure into more engaged consumption. Among these, she found users’ perceptions of the trustworthiness and reliability of the news provider were the least important of all factors. Instead, the ‘characteristics of the news recommendation’, such as a friend or family member forwarding a link to a story — ‘social curation’ — had a stronger impact on users’ perceptions.

Kümpel’s findings were consistent with the work of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), who found the existence of ‘opinion leaders’ and ‘opinion followers’ within peer groups. Mutz and Young (2011) argued the social media environment is cluttered with so many choices, users need help — from their friends — curating it. And Turcotte et al., (2015, p.521) referred to a ‘peer-to-peer process of digital news exposure’, where users rely on opinion leaders in their group.

Overall, incidental news exposure can lead to greater news engagement. However, it also brings about the diminution in the status of news brands, and the ascent of peer-to-peer social curation. Ultimately, substantive engagement with news content boils down to whether, in a crowded landscape, users encounter content that is of interest and relevance to them. One way of providing both these factors is through greater personalisation of content.

4.8 Conclusion on incidental exposure

In May 2020, the highest rated UK TV news broadcast was BBC News at Six, on BBC One, receiving 5.6 million viewers (BARB, 2020c). However, audiences aged 16-24, on average, consumed fewer than one in six of the minutes viewed by the rest of the population (Ofcom, 2019b, p.31). If a comedian or influencer had taken a clip from the news, added a comment and shared it on social media, that influencer-clip might well have reached more young people than the original story. Many of those young viewers would not know the story had come from the BBC, nor would they care (Figure 3.5). Yet the story had reached them, nonetheless.

Thus, the traditional process by which news is spread has changed. Instead of a linear news cycle, controlled by professional journalists, we have a more complex ‘political information cycle’ (Chadwick, 2011), where online semi-professional bloggers and other ‘non elite participants’ insert themselves into the production, dissemination and interpretation of news events.

Boczkowski et al. (2018, p.3534) claimed this led to: ‘a loss of hierarchy and a re-contextualization of the news report’. On social media, news ceases to have

its own primetime show. Instead, it gets a cameo appearance on a never-ending variety show, alongside jugglers and ventriloquists. Editors no longer dictate which story is the most important of the day.

> ‘The notion that a newspaper or a television show is an authoritative rendition of the day’s main events loses significance in the social media maelstrom. Thus, the emergence of incidental news marks a significant discontinuity with the consumption of news in print and broadcast media, and, albeit to a lesser extent, with the consumption of news on the web using computers’. (Boczkowski, Mitchelstein & Matassi, 2017, p.1786).

The problem for news organisations — and the politicians, policymakers and pressure groups who feed off each other — is they are losing their power to set the agenda for public discourse. Where news is filtered by friends and family, who are more trusted than the news professionals (Turcotte et al., 2015), and by algorithms that power the technology platforms, and where news is one of many content genres competing for attention, then the status of news broadcasters is downgraded significantly.

In this new world order, broadcasters are demoted from super brands to white label manufacturers, churning out white boxes of content, onto which any commentator can add their own label. This set of facts matters to shareholders of news companies. It is a marketing problem for those who manage brand identities, but it is unclear why it should concern anyone interested in democracy.

The research shows traditional broadcast news is in rapid decline among 16-34s, who have migrated to social media (Table 3.8). But the pessimism about the consequences of incidental news exposure, perhaps, has more to do with nostalgia and journalistic self-interest than it does with political engagement among young adults. Undoubtedly, there is superficial news consumption on social media among some young people with low levels of news interest, but the evidence from Channel 4 News (in Chapter 6) is there also is a significant volume of highly engaged, active, young news consumers.

Clearly, if some social media users, some of the time, purposely avoid news, due to feelings of news information overload, their exposure to news will become superficial. However, social media users are exposed superficially to a large number of news stories (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017, pp. 2461-2462). It is impossible to calculate if news consumption overall is higher or lower, because there are so many variables and no calculus to compare one type of consumption with another.

The research shows it is possible to learn techniques that turn incidental exposure into engaged consumption, ‘Promiscuous’ into ‘Diligent’. For example, we know social media users engage more when stories are shared by an ‘opinion leader’ (Bergström & Belfrage, 2018). The level of trust in a particular news brand is of relative low importance, compared to the weight social media users place on ‘opinion leaders’ in their peer group (Kümpel, 2018). So, whilst news providers deservedly are proud of levels of trust in their brands, it is self indulgent to market this particular trait to 16-34s. Instead, they

could employ strategies that encourage their most ‘Diligent’ consumers — who likely are regarded as ‘opinion leaders’ — to spread stories to their friends.

A marketing campaign — perhaps labelled something akin to ‘Pass it On’ — would have the double benefit of (a) being effective at reaching and engaging with more passive news consumers via their more engaged friends, and (b) creating an opportunity to devise storymaking techniques (Berkowitz, 2015), inviting young ‘opinion leaders’ into the news creation process. The latter is an area woefully neglected by broadcast news media, who cling jealously to their privileged status as storytellers, while the media landscape around them has changed dramatically.

The ‘people formerly known as the audience’ (Rosen, 2006) is a phrase with a newly revealed double meaning. In the original sense of Rosen’s manifesto, the audience wishes to participate in the co-creation of content, and the new meaning is a threat 16-34s will become the ‘former audience’, i.e. they will abandon old news brands altogether.

Practitioners concerned about incidental news exposure could focus more on the supply side, arguably which is to blame for problems on the demand side; namely journalists who are: ‘compromised by their proximity to social power’ (Coleman, et al., 2011, p.39); ‘mainly white, middle-class and London-centric’ with a Westminster news agenda that has little to do with the lives of many young people (Ofcom, 2019b, p.21). Different journalists with different backgrounds and perspectives may well have spotted how to navigate incidental news exposure, rather than soldering on as if nothing had changed.

Chapter 5
Personalisation, Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers

5.0 ‘The Daily Me’

In 1995, Nicholas Negroponte, Founder of Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Media Lab predicted ‘The Daily Me’, a virtual daily newspaper, uniquely customised for every citizen. No longer would everyone receive the same general newspapers, the vast proportion of whose content they would never read. Instead, sports enthusiasts would receive more sports pages; arts lovers, more arts pages, and so on. All this, Negroponte conjectured, would be possible with algorithmic curation, born of the digital age — the process by which computers are programmed to learn or remember the type of content each user likes, then delivers only that type of content (Negroponte, 1995).

Negroponte was remarkably prescient. Today, Apple News, Google News, Facebook and Twitter are, in effect, ‘The Daily Me’. Their platforms record our web browsing histories to discern the type of content most likely to appeal to us, then they pre-select the stories that appear in our newsfeeds.

By definition, personalisation narrows the range of news stories a user will receive, to the genres in which they have displayed an interest. If a user regularly watches stories about US President Donald Trump, that is what a personalised news service will provide. The negative consequence is it will feed relatively fewer stories about other genres.

The major UK broadcast news outlets have virtually zero personalisation on their digital platforms. Mostly, they offer all users a shopping list of the same content produced for broadcast, with no intelligent algorithmic curation. It is a one-size-fits-all approach, where everyone sees the same list of stories and can decide for themselves what they wish to consume.

Historically, the role of news curation has fallen to editors. The Editor of Sky News or the Editor of ITV News would decide which of the world's events are of greatest importance, then they would fill their TV programmes with the best selection (in their opinion). However, more young people are not getting their news directly from broadcasters; instead they get it via social media and news aggregators, which employ filtering technologies (Table 3.8) (Ofcom 2019a, p.71). Consequently, the role of the journalist-editor-curator has — by stealth — been substituted for algorithmic curation.

Inevitably, and by definition, algorithmic curation will lead to a disproportionate numbers of stories about a genre appearing in each individual's newsfeed. Young people who are interested in climate change or human rights increasingly will see more of those stories, and fewer stories about issues in which they are disinterested. The question among scholars is the degree to which a narrower range of news stories and a possible concomitant narrower range of opinions expressed therein impact on how people think and act in the real world.

5.1 What is an algorithm?

An algorithm is a series of steps that can be followed to produce an answer to a problem, often expressed as a mathematical formula, comprised of numerous variables. The ‘problem’ for social media sites is deciding which posts, among the millions, should appear high up in a user’s newsfeed, in order to show stories that matter most to them.

Facebook’s algorithm is based on the Vickrey-Clarke-Groves (‘VCG’) auction, a type of blind bidding process, originally designed in the 1960s by Nobel Prize winning economists, William Vickrey, Edward Clarke and Theodore Groves. The system prioritises giving users what they want by taking into consideration four key factors: Inventory, Signals, Predictions and Final Score (Swan, 2020).

‘Inventory’ is all posts on the platform, including those posted by brands and individuals. The purpose of a change to the Facebook algorithm in 2018 (Chapter 5.2) was to give greater weight to posts from friends and family, over posts from brands.

‘Signals' are the metadata users — mostly advertisers — input to identify what type of content they are posting, and to whom it is targeted, e.g., information about the content genre and its target demographic.

‘Predictions’ are Facebook’s calculation of the behaviour of individual users, which indicates their likely response to the content posted.

And ‘Score’ is a final overall number given to a post, indicating whether a user will respond positively to it.

‘Predictions’ are perhaps the most interesting aspect of the overall algorithmic equation. Exactly how Facebook calculates the behaviour of users is shrouded in mystery. It requires collecting a mass of data about users’ past behaviours and those of other users, who have similar traits and have made similar customer journeys. One method used to aid this is the use of cookies. Cookies are small pieces of text, used to store information on web browsers. They track users’ web histories, record what they see and pass this data back to the social media site. For example, if a Facebook user searches a shopping website for a pram, a cookie will record this action. When the user next visits Facebook, their newsfeed likely will populate with stories echoing the retail search e.g. stories about having a baby. Facebook is reading the cookies from the shopping journey and comparing these to millions of other users’ past behaviours, before concluding the user likely is searching for a pram, because she is pregnant, in which case, it is likely she also would be interested in certain types of news.

Facebook’s Cookie Policy states:

> ‘Cookies enable Facebook to offer the Facebook Products to you and to understand the information we receive about you, including information about your use of other websites and apps, whether or not you are registered or logged in’. (Facebook, 2018).

There is no intended malevolence in the use of cookies and associated algorithmic curation. No doubt, many people find them very helpful in providing relevant information when they need it. That is their raison d'être.

5.2 Facebook's 2018 algorithm change

On 19 January 2018, Facebook Founder, Mark Zuckerberg posted a statement on his Facebook page, commented on recent changes to the social media platform. He wrote:

> 'Last week, I announced a major change to encourage meaningful social interactions with family and friends over passive consumption. As a result, you'll see less public content including news, video and posts from brands. After this change, we expect news to make up roughly 4% of News Feed, down from roughly 5% today. This is a big change, but news will always be a critical way for people to start conversations on important topics'. (Zuckerberg, 2018).

Facebook had changed its algorithm, the rules that decide which stories appear in users' social media feeds, to reduce the quantity of news stories. At the time, news stories comprised 5 per cent of all information seen on Facebook, and the algorithm change would, by design, reduce this to 4 per cent, representing an average 20 per cent drop in viewing for news content on the platform.

Zuckerberg did not do this because he was trying to punish news publishers. His rationale was news had contributed to an increase in 'passive consumption' and he wanted to 'encourage meaningful social interactions'. In other words, news is a tiny fraction of what Facebook is about, and too much of it leads to trivial and insignificant consumption on the platform. News would henceforth be relegated by the algorithm. News is not an end in itself for Facebook. It is a

means to an end. It can be used as a springboard ‘to start conversations’, but the end is ‘meaningful social interactions with family and friends’. (Ibid.).

Cornia et al. (2018) found the immediate impact of the Facebook policy, for some news organisations, was profound. French broadcaster, LCI told the researchers: ‘We have lost 30% of our traffic from social networks, from Facebook. It’s a big deal’. (Ibid., 31).

For others, the shock was less impactful; it depended on how they adjusted their social media strategies to cope with the change. The Times, and those whose business models were based on subscription, made few changes and seemed immune to the algorithmic change, presumably because subscribers were loyal to their content and visited their pages intentionally, rather than coming to them incidentally. Whereas, ITV News saw its daily interactions on Facebook drop by 13 per cent. At the same time, ITV News increased its average number of daily Facebook posts from 16 to 18, albeit it told the researchers this was not a direct response to the Facebook change (Ibid., 35).

The revealing thing for many observers was the precision with which Facebook could program its algorithm to yield such specific and immediate results.

5.3 Netflix's artwork personalisation

Although Netflix exists in a different content genre than news — entertainment and drama — its method of personalising content is in the vanguard, and doubtless offers insights for news publishers.

Every customer of the subscription video on demand service sees a different version of Netflix, depending on their tastes. The Netflix corporate website states:

> ‘Our goal is to help members discover great content that they will enjoy. Personalisation is one of the pillars of Netflix because it allows each member to have a different view of our content that adapts to their interests and can help expand their interests over time. It enables us to not have just one Netflix product but hundreds of millions of products: one for each member profile. Each experience is personalised across many dimensions: the suggested videos and their ranking, the way videos are organised into rows and pages, and even the artwork displayed. To do this deep personalisation, we combine a multitude of different algorithmic approaches to address each unique member’s needs. Personalisation starts on the homepage but also extends out across the product and beyond, such as deciding what messages to send our members to keep them informed and engaged’. (Netflix, n.d.).

Netflix's process of algorithmic curation is designed to give customers what they want; to make life easier for them by feeding them content that will be of interest. The volume of potential content is so vast, only a technological solution could navigate all that is on offer. Anybody who has ever searched for something to watch on Netflix might question the efficacy of its personalisation, however presumably they spend less time searching than they would without the algorithmic pre-selection, narrowing down the list of choices.

Netflix knows which shows each customer has watched. It knows which shows they started to watch, but did not finish. It knows which day of the week, or time of the day, is best to target them with a drama or an action movie. Its algorithm discerns what kind of person they are and what future shows they would like.

Because Netflix has this good understanding of each customer's personality, behaviour and tastes, it uses customised images to promote the same shows to different users. They call this 'artwork personalisation'. It means multiple promotional thumbnail images are created for each show, and each user sees only the artwork that matches his or her profile, and is most likely to persuade them to watch the show.

A 7 December 2017 company blogpost stated:

> 'Let us consider trying to personalise the image we use to depict the movie *Good Will Hunting*. Here we might personalise this decision based on how much a member prefers different genres and themes. Someone who has watched many romantic movies may be interested in *Good Will Hunting* if we show the artwork containing Matt Damon and Minnie Driver, whereas, a member who has watched many comedies might be drawn to the movie if we use the artwork containing Robin Williams, a well-known comedian'. (Netflix, 2017).

On 20 October 2018, The Guardian ran a story about Netflix's customers complaining the artwork they received was based on their racial profile. It alleged African American customers would receive artwork featuring black actors, while Caucasian Americans would receive artwork featuring white

actors, for the same show. The TV series, ‘Like Father’ was featured as an example, with the different promotional images received by Netflix customers placed side by side (Figure 5.1) (The Guardian, 2018).

Figure 5.1. Netflix: Example of Artwork Personalisation

▲ Like father is presented with black actors Leonard Ouzts and Blaire Brooks. Photograph: Twitter Kelly Quantrill @codetrill and stacia l. brown @slb79

Source: Guardian. Oct 2018

Netflix issued a statement, included in the Guardian report:

> ‘We don’t ask members for their race, gender or ethnicity so we cannot use this information to personalise their individual Netflix experience. The only information we use is a member’s viewing history’. (Ibid.).

Netflix’s cursory response and the company’s refusal to answer further questions (from me) on the topic, indicate extreme sensitivity about American racial politics, as much as it exposes secrecy over algorithmic curation. The

Netflix statement is not a direct denial of the gist of what was alleged. Politicians call this statement a ‘non-denial denial’, as it gives an impression of a denial, while not expressly refuting the main claim. Logically, it is not necessary to ‘ask members for their gender’ in order to discern their sex, with a high degree of accuracy — for example, from their name. So, for Netflix to say: ‘we cannot use this information’ is somewhat misleading. Similarly, race and ethnicity could be discerned, albeit with less accuracy than sex, by cross-referencing a member’s name with other data obtained from their viewing history, and from the cookies monitoring their web history.

A separate entry on Netflix’s blogpost appears somewhat to concede this point:

> ‘Of course, to properly learn how to personalise artwork we need to collect *a lot* of data to find signals that indicate when one piece of artwork is significantly better for a member’. (Netflix, n.d.).

It is not known if Netflix’s algorithm discovered black audiences were more likely to watch shows promoted with artwork featuring black actors, or whether white audiences were less likely to watch shows promoted with the faces of black actors. It is possible the Netflix algorithm came across these phenomena, and programmed the artwork accordingly, by machine learning, without human intervention. In which case, it raises ethical and perhaps legal questions about whether it is acceptable for an algorithm to racially profile if it learns people behave differently, according to race, even if the human behaviour is subconscious.

Despite this glitch, news providers could adopt Netflix's approach to artwork personalisation for the thumbnail images used to promote news stories; this would be in addition to algorithmic curation for the substantive content. For example, politically liberal users might be found more likely to click to watch a story about a demonstration if the thumbnail image showed police officers hitting demonstrators with batons, while — for the same story — conservative users might be more attracted by an image depicting demonstrators throwing Molotov cocktails, or vice versa. Thus, artwork personalisation within news has the potential to show audiences different images of the world, even when reporting the same stories.

Already, readers of right-wing or left-wing newspapers experience this; they see different images because of choices made by human editors, with specific political agendas, with which presumably those readers concur — because they buy those newspapers voluntarily. The difference with artwork personalisation inside online news is it would impact readers of the same publication, and the decisions on which artwork they see would arise from machine learning about individual users' predilections, rather than conscious decisions by human editors, or conscious choices by users.

5.4 The filter bubble

The filter bubble is the:

> '…state that an individual would find themselves in if they relied heavily on services that use algorithmic selection to filter out news, ideas, and perspectives that differ from their own' (EU, 2019, p.6).

The term ‘filter bubble’ was coined by Eli Pariser, an American entrepreneur and Internet activist, in his 2011 book, ‘The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You’ (Pariser, 2011). Pariser argued the 2009 decision by Google to customise search results heralded a new era for the World Wide Web, one in which information received was personalised by the algorithms that power the software platforms, used everyday. The artificially intelligent software would learn to filter content based on previous selections, in order to find new content that best matches users’ proclivities.

Eric Schmidt, then Google Chief Executive Officer, told the Guardian:

> ‘The technology will be so good, it will be very hard for people to watch or consume something that has not in some sense been tailored for them… we know roughly who you are, roughly what you care about, roughly who your friends are’. (The Guardian, 2010).

The bubble created by the algorithmic filter is an environment wherein all the news content is of a kind, to which the user is predisposed. This could be a genre, like sports news, or celebrity news. It could also be news stories that reflect a set of political biases, such as crime caused by immigrants; corporate corruption, or Islamist extremism. While there are legitimate news stories about each of these aspects of life, if a user is interested in one of these, the algorithm potentially will feed him or her a non-stop diet of related stories. The more they read, the more it affirms the algorithmic selection, so more similar stories will be fed. The bubble is that space where the user gets a disproportionate number of stories, so it impacts their perception of the real

world. They might begin to think there is an Al Qaeda terrorist hiding around every corner, or an illegal immigrant about to murder them in their bed.

Pariser was concerned about creating a world in which people only saw content for which they had expressed a pre-interest, as well as content expressing opinions with which they already agree. He believed also the 'invisible algorithmic editing of the web' was a problem, because content was being curated without users' knowledge or consent. We would only see what the algorithm showed us. It is as if there were a manuscript, from which not only are huge chunks of text redacted, we cannot see where the redactions have been made, nor do we understand the mechanism employed to reach these decisions.

Microsoft Founder, Bill Gates concurred, lamenting the technology which:

> '…lets you go off with like-minded people, so you're not mixing and sharing and understanding other points of view... It's turned out to be more of a problem than I, or many others, would have expected'. (Gates, 2017).

The key thing about the filter bubble is it is a state of existence created by machines, by artificial intelligence and algorithms. It is not caused directly by conscious human action, other than the fact it is humans who create the original algorithms before these are released to machine-learn by themselves.

De Vries and Hildebrandt (2013) refer to the mechanism as 'algorithmic pre-selection' because users' choices are narrowed by the search engine, news

aggregator or social networking site, before users are presented with a personalised list of options. It is as if one asked the question: ‘Where should I go for dinner tonight?’ And the computer replied with a list of three Chinese restaurants, because it knows you love Chinese food. Those restaurants are undoubtedly good choices, but the algorithm is denying the user the option of an Italian or French restaurant.

De Vries and Hildebrandt (2013) added:

> ‘When information is sorted out or summarised, this requires rather a large amount of epistemic trust to whoever or whatever is in charge of the selection’. (Ibid., 1).

But many are sceptical whether citizens should give their trust so readily to the computer scientists who create the algorithms.

5.5 Trust in the algorithm

Ted Striphas, author of ‘The Late Age of Print’, said in a radio interview:

> ‘What I think we're beginning to see emerge in and around algorithmic culture is a tremendous amount of deference being afforded to engineers, mathematicians, computer scientists… When we go to search for something on Google, that tells us what we need to know, it gives us our bearings in the world, and that in a sense becomes productive of the stuff of culture. And you know that's a tremendous responsibility to fall on the shoulders of any one group, and to reduce

> that to a mathematical formula, however complex, I think doesn't really do justice to the full richness of culture’. (Funnell, 2012).

The issue for Striphas was the loss of humanity in the use of algorithms. Humans literally are being edited out of the process of curation of human culture and replaced with machines, with whom we cannot argue or even understand the mechanisms by which they act. It is not necessarily a question of whether the algorithm is doing a good job, i.e., accurately selecting stories users will want; let us assume that is a given. Striphas’ sentiments exhibit a sadness for the loss of human error and serendipity and arguments that spring from a human-centred curation process.

Consider a single news bulletin; take Channel 4 News. As 16-34s desert the evening broadcast television show at 19:00, and instead watch it on Facebook or YouTube, a few things accompany that journey. First, they do not watch the full one hour broadcast, which might contain a dozen stories that were sculpted into a logical running order. Story #1 is the most important story, according to the Editor, and Story #3 is positioned there because of the context provided to it by Story #2. The digital viewer does not benefit from any of this sequencing. Instead, their Facebook newsfeed promotes an individual story — say Story #3 — because it is about a subject in which they have previously expressed an interest. The user may well love Story #3 and really engage with it, but they are not offered any other story. The Editor is not completely redundant, because he commissioned all the stories, but a large part of his curation function has been replaced by the algorithm.

The logical next step for computer science is to ask: why even bother with a human editor? Instead, allow an algorithm to commission news stories based on the known consumption habits of target audiences. The algorithm could identify key words to use, people to interview, angles to cover, even duration of stories, colour of graphics, and the appropriate promotional artwork. News aggregators do a little bit of this; but not much (Associated Press, 2020). Mostly, they sift through news stories human editors have already commissioned and published, then present a unique selection of these for each individual user. There is a distinction — albeit in practical terms, not much — between this and getting rid of human editors altogether, using algorithms to commission the stories.

5.6 Emotional contagion

Fears about trusting algorithms with the fate of human culture were magnified in 2014 when the Guardian reported Facebook had been runing experiments to change the mood of unwitting users (Guardian, 2014). The social networking site manipulated the newsfeeds of 689,000 users in order to make them feel emotionally more positive, or more negative, about life. Facebook was working with a team of academic researchers from Cornell University. Kramer, Guillory and Hancock (2014) were testing whether ‘emotional contagion’ — a well-known phenomenon in the physical world, where one person’s emotions affect others — could be present on social networking sites, where there is no physical contact between parties.

They concluded:

> ‘When positive expressions were reduced, people produced fewer positive posts and more negative posts; when negative expressions were reduced, the opposite pattern occurred. These results indicate that emotions expressed by others on Facebook influence our own emotions, constituting experimental evidence for massive-scale contagion via social networks’. (Kramer, Guillory & Hancock, 2014, p.8788).

Albert Einstein said: ‘God does not play dice with the universe’, but it seems Silicon Valley can, and does.

The logic of the Kramer et al. (2014) finding is a social networking site could manipulate its algorithm to make citizens feel positive or negative about life in, for example, the run-up to a General Election. Perhaps it could increase incidents of suicide? Or equally troubling, without conscious human motivation, a computer intelligence that is designed only to maximise revenue might determine a heavy-weighting of positive news stories contributes to people feeling happy, and when people feel happy, they spend more money. So, the algorithm could depress negative stories about the world because, it determines, depressed people do not go shopping. All this seems plausible if the Kramer et al. (2014) finding is accurate and replicable.

The algorithms that control the newsfeeds are capable also of influencing the political agenda in society (Feezell, 2017). For example, if one group of people is continually fed a certain genre of stories, whille another group is fed stories with an opposing viewpoint, effectively these two groups could be

‘programmed’ to come into conflict. This could happen by targeted advertising on social media or — wittingly or unwittingly — by the humans who write the algorithms, or it could be done independently by the artificial intelligence, which powers the algorithms to learn and grow.

Ignoring the possible presence of human malevolence — such as fake news and political mischief-making — the algorithms of the social media platforms and news aggregators have been created to maximise views and engagement, by providing users with content they want. But one side effect, potentially, is this might lead to accelerating political polarisation, and perversely, political polarisation might be good for business.

Subscriptions to both pro- and anti-Trump media in the US, and to pro- and anti-Brexit media in the UK, went up as the issues heated up (Forbes.com, 2020). But what is good for business clearly is not good for social harmony. Sunstein (2009) identified a conflict of interest between news consumers as customers and as citizens. He emphasised the need to regulate social networks to downgrade some of their commercial interests, so their actions could be brought into line with the best interests of society.

5.7 Issue salience

Feezell (2017) investigated whether the agenda-setting capacity of news, when communicated via traditional media, continued to exist when news travelled a vicarious route to audiences on social media. She demonstrated stories in social media feeds increased issue salience, and reduced the likelihood of decay of salience in issues, especially among the politically disinterested.

Feezell (2017) experimented with students in Facebook groups. She planted stories over a 75-day period and later asked students how important were those story-issues. A control group and the experimental group were tested and the results compared. They showed the experimental group attributed greater importance to issues they were being fed surreptitiously, compared to the control group, who were fed other stories. The conclusion was: despite social media coinciding with a decline in young persons' direct use of traditional media, social media itself had the ability to impart issue salience, especially among those with low levels of political engagement.

While Ofcom (2019b, p.27) found young people with low levels of interest in news were most likely to consume their news incidentally on social media — apparently proving the Matthew Effect, where the 'information poor' get poorer — Feezell (2017) found these same people with the least interest in the news were the ones getting the most salience from this method of consumption.

The relevance of Feezell (2017) to filter bubbles is — it follows — the issues covered in stories received via algorithmic curation become more salient to recipients. Users begin with an interest in a topic; the related story-count is magnified by algorithmic curation, and the salience of that issue also is magnified, reflecting the frequency with which users are bombarded with like-stories. This is a virtuous or vicious circle, depending on one's perspective.

5.8 The echo chamber

The European Union's Panel for the Future of Science and Technology defined 'echo chamber' as:

> ‘…an environment where individuals are over-exposed to news, ideas, and perspectives similar to their own, creating a false impression of how widely held they are by the rest of the population’. (European Parliament, 2019, p.6).

The echo chamber can be a result of the filter bubble, but the two are not the same thing. Echo chambers pre-date the Internet and social media. Every club, association or political party, to some degree, is an echo chamber; by definition, they are a collection of like-minds who congregate to wrap themselves in a comfort blanket of self-rectitude. The readers of most British national newspapers inhabit echo chambers, as most of the papers are heavily aligned, either to a political party or to a set of political values, which pervade their headlines and story choices. And people can live in an echo chamber by surrounding themselves only with friends of a like-political mind.

The ubiquity of the web, and increasing reliance on social media, have conspired to put rocket boosters under this ancient phenomenon. Technology makes it easier for people to coalesce into networks of like-minds and to find themselves cocooned from outside views.

If you are concerned about climate change, you can join a Facebook group devoted to that topic; subscribe to an environmentalist newsletter, or sign an online petition. At this point, you are connected to a wider community of people who share a passion for climate change advocacy. This may be considered a positive effect of the Internet, namely a potential to boost political engagement. However, when a relevant news story breaks, members of the group likely start

to share the story, add commentary, magnify aspects that support their agenda and diminish other aspects. Quickly, activists can whip each other up into a frenzy; a form of confirmation bias, accelerated by super fast Internet connectivity.

Personalisation of content, it is argued, contributes to the echo chamber. News providers and technology platforms are motivated to give customers what they want, because this leads to more frequent, voluminous and engaged consumption. Personalisation means narrowing the range of stories to which users are exposed; that is its intended consequence. The unintended consequence, allegedly, is this narrowing leads to an echo chamber that works to the detriment of civil discourse (Flaxman et al., 2016; Pariser, 2011).

American legal scholar, Cass Sunstein was one of the first voices to warn of the potential threat to democracy caused by the echo chamber. He explained:

> ‘A lot of people love reading things that fortify and confirm their own opinions — and, by definition, people like reading about topics that interest them. So, freedom of choice can produce self-sorting, in which people enter echo chambers or information cocoons’. (Sunstein, 2017).

In an extract from his 2001 book, ‘Republic.com’, Sunstein wrote:

> ‘…people should be exposed to materials that they would not have chosen in advance. Unanticipated encounters, involving topics and points of view that people have not sought out and perhaps find quite

> irritating, are central to democracy and even to freedom itself'. (Sunstein, 2001, p.320).

Sunstein argued: widely distributed newspapers, magazines and news broadcasts provided shared experiences, which were vital for building community in a heterogenous society. He deplored the fact intense personalisation allowed people to become insulated into narrow groups within an increasingly fragmented society; something he termed 'cultural balkanisation'.

Sunstein and Pariser's pessimistic views about personalisation have been hugely influential. The terms 'echo chamber' and 'filter bubble' have entered the popular lexicon, and their negative connotations are assumed by many to be facts. But the overall picture is more complex than both these authors considered at the start of the twenty-first century, and much of the recent evidence shows those aged 16-34 are least impacted by some of the predicted negative outcomes, as shown in the following section (Chapter 5.9).

5.9 Online users consuming contrary views

According to Ofcom's Media Use and Attitudes Report 2019:

> '…social media users are increasingly shielding themselves from opinions which differ from their own'. (Ofcom, 2019d, p.9).

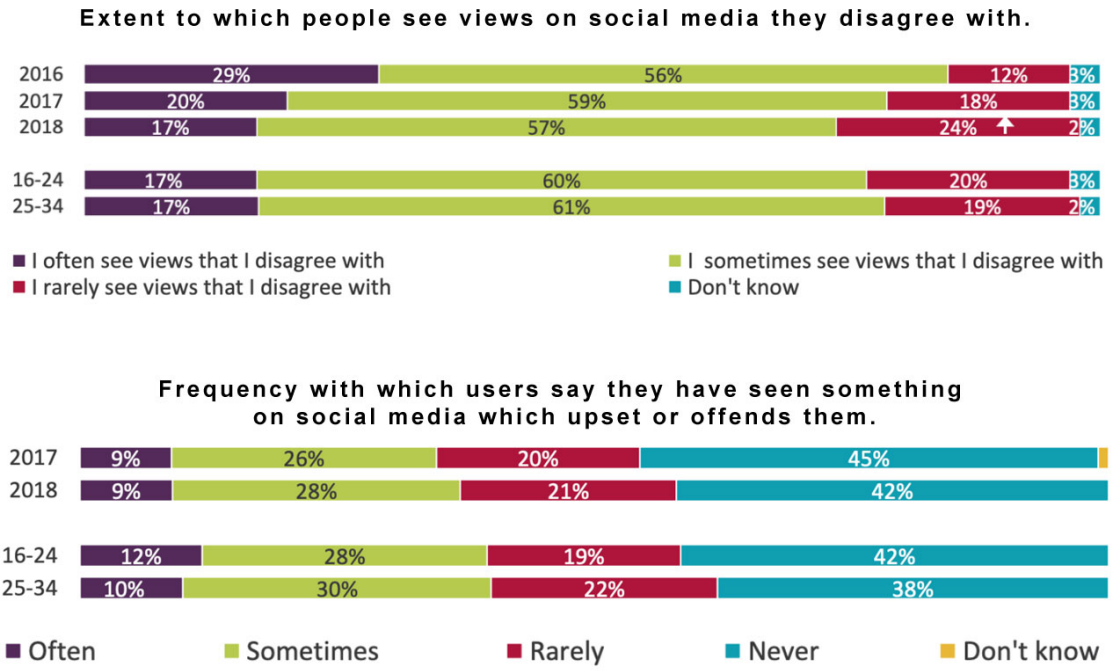
Figure 5.2 shows, in 2016, 29 per cent of social media users surveyed agreed with the statement: 'I *often* see views that I disagree with'. By 2018, this number had dropped sharply to 17 per cent.

Meanwhile, those who concurred with the statement: 'I *rarely* see views that I disagree with' doubled from 12 per cent in 2016 to 24 per cent in 2018.

However, this pattern of sheltering from disagreeable views was less marked for those aged 16-34, who were more likely than older age groups to 'sometimes or often' see content with which they disagreed. They were also significantly less likely to 'rarely' see disagreeable views.

And the same data showed more people were seeing things on social media that 'upset or offend' them. Again, those aged 16-24 were most likely to 'often' see upsetting or offensive content (12 per cent).

Figure 5.2. Ofcom: Disagreeable and offensive views on social media



Source: Ofcom Media LiteracyTracker 2018.
IN28. 'When you use social media, which one of these best applies?'
IN30A. 'Have you seen anything that upset or offended you in the last 12 months on any of the social media sites you uses?'
Base: All adults aged 16+ with a social media profile/account. (1247 people).

Overall, there was a clear difference in experiences with social media content, dependent on age, with younger audiences more likely to see disagreeable, upsetting and offensive content.

One explanation for this is young people consume more content on social media than older people, thus have more opportunities to be offended. For example, 79 per cent of 16-24s say they watch streaming video online, against only 43 per cent of those aged 55-64 (Ofcom, 2019d, p.3).

Moreover, when young people use social media, they access more disparate sources of news than older people. Their consumption is driven by myriad links and shares sent by family and friends, whereas older people tend to make targeted decisions to visit specific news sites (Table 3.4), including newspaper sites that match their political affiliations (Garrett, 2009; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

> ‘The explanation is clear in retrospect: when browsing directly, individuals typically visit only a handful of news sources, whereas social media sites expose users to more variety’. (Flaxman et al., 2016, p.313).

So, while Ofcom found an increasing trend towards echo chambers, 16-34s were the least effected by this trend, as their consumption patterns lent towards more varied news sources than older social media users.

5.10 Ideological Segregation

Flaxman et al. (2016) asked what was the effect of contemporary methods of disseminating news on population-level 'ideological segregation', which they defined as:

> '…the expected difference in the conservative shares of news outlets visited by two randomly selected individuals'. (Ibid., 300).

Essentially, segregation is a measure of the degree to which people of different political opinions are isolated from each other in the media they use.

Flaxman et al. (2016) used machine-learning algorithms to examine the web search history of 1.2 million US online news consumers over a three-month period. They defined four channels, through which users could access news — direct to news site, aggregator sites, social media, and web search. And they split news into two types — 'descriptive reporting' and 'opinion'.

Significantly, they focussed on a subset of 'active news consumers', who read at least ten substantive news articles (excluding sport and entertainment news), and two opinion pieces; thereby reducing the studied population to 4 per cent of the potential universe, i.e., 50,000 people.

They found just one in three hundred outbound clicks from Facebook were to news stories. While opinion stories accounted for 6 per cent of all hard news consumption; one-third of traffic to opinion stories came from social media or search. In other words, social media and search disproportionately serviced opinion journalism over descriptive reporting.

They found ideological segregation was substantially higher for opinion pieces, than it was for descriptive reporting; it was higher also for social media and search than it was for direct browsing, and lowest for aggregators, because — citing Das et al. (2007):

> '…aggregators return personalised news results from a broad set of publications with disparate ideological leanings'. (Flaxman et al., 2016, p.312).

Ideological segregation was less for less active news consumers; in other words, it effects disproportionately the most active news consumers. They found online behaviour was mirroring offline behaviour, with 75 per cent of all news consumption going to mainstream news outlets. So, the impact of technological change per se seemed marginal, at most.

Flaxman et al. (2016, pp.313-317) concluded 'nearly all users' exist in echo chambers, and social media and search contributed to ideological segregation, but: 'their overall effects at this time are somewhat limited'.

And as their findings arose from an examination only of the most active 4 per cent of news consumers, by implication, they could not be applied to, what I termed, the 'Promiscuous' and 'Disconnected' (Table 2.2) behaviour of many 16-34s:

> 'It is unclear what impact recent technological changes have on the majority of individuals who have little exposure to the news, but who may get that limited amount largely from social media'. (Ibid., 318).

5.11 Cross-cutting exposure

Cross-cutting exposure is:

> '…the disagreement in viewpoints encountered by individuals in their communication environments'. (Matthes, Knoll, Valenzuela, Hopmann & Von Sikorski, 2019, p.523).

It has been found encountering disagreement increases individuals' tolerance (Pattie & Johnston, 2008); ability to argue (Price, Cappella & Nir, 2002), and facility to hold accurate beliefs (Garrett, Weeks & Neo, 2016).

While cross-cutting exposure can be seen as the opposite of the echo chamber, its effects are not uniform. Paradoxically, some have found it can reinforce the effects of the echo chamber. Diana Mutz's work (Mutz, 2002a; Mutz, 2002b) examined the relationship between cross-cutting exposure and political participation. She found when people encountered political differences in their social networks, it triggered ambivalence, threatened social harmony, and deterred citizens from active political involvement. Thus, she uncovered an ironic choice between a 'deliberative versus participatory democracy' (Mutz, 2006). Society could choose to expose itself to contrary views, and debate the issues, but if it does so, likely this will lead to lower levels of participation (Moehler & Conroy-Krutz, 2016).

Bail et al. (2018) reached similar conclusions. They conducted an experiment where left-wing and right-wing social media users received Twitter messages voicing opposing political views. Afterwards, they found both sets of users expressed more entrenched views.

There is other research that suggests cross-cutting exposure can lead to greater engagement. Flaxman et al. (2016) found:

> ‘Interestingly, exposure to opposing perspectives is higher for the channels associated with the highest segregation, search, and social. Thus, counterintuitively, we find evidence that recent technological changes both increase and decrease various aspects of the partisan divide’. (Flaxman et al., 2016, p.300).

In other words, while Flaxman et al. (2016) found more ideological segregation via social media, they also found users were more likely to be exposed to cross-cutting ideas. Exposure to conflicting views seemed to reinforce users’ original prejudices, at least among the 4 per cent of highly active news consumers analysed by Flaxman et al. (2016).

5.12 Self-selection and polarisation

DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson (1996, p.693) defined polarisation as:

> ‘…the extent to which opinions on an issue are opposed in relation to some theoretical maximum’.

As media choice expands, consumers likely experience a feeling of news information overload, and some respond to this by self-selecting news sources that echo their already established viewpoints (Lee, Kim & Koh, 2016). However, the tendency of young social media users not to go directly to news sites — and instead rely on family and friends to make news recommendations — acts as a counterweight to self-selected news (Messing & Westwood, 2014).

The existence of self-selected news does not negate the existence of cross-cutting exposure. People with the most clearly defined political views have been found likely to seek out and consume media that conflicts with their views. Garrett (2009) found whilst people do have a stronger preference for opinion-reinforcing stories, they consume — only marginally less — opinion-challenging stories.

Heatherly, Lu and Lee (2017) found cross-cutting exposure was high for US social media users, but the more polarised users were to begin with — defined as the difference in how favourable they rated Democrats versus Republicans — the lesser was the ameliorating effect of the conflicting political opinions. So, for example, a climate change activist might read what climate change deniers were saying, perhaps in order to understand how the enemy thinks. The consequence of this cross-cutting exposure among already polarised people was it reinforced their existing polarisation.

Beam, Hutchens and Hmielowski (2018) found the use of Facebook for news resulted in net de-polarisation, due largely to increased cross-cutting exposure. Whereas a study by Bail et al. (2018), conducted during the 2016 US presidential campaign, found cross-cutting exposure contributed to increased polarisation. Flaxman et al. (2016) found different media channels had different effects on cross-cutting exposure and polarisation; what was true of Facebook might not be true of Google News or Twitter. And the fact people use multiple channels for news — and consume other non-news content in far greater

volumes than news content — meant it was difficult to isolate the effect of any single channel, and extrapolate it to the wider population.

Bakshy, Messing and Adamic (2015) provide the most comprehensive research, whose findings are a significant outlier. It found Facebook users were in an echo chamber due to self-selection. The platform's algorithmic pre-selection contributed also to the echo chamber, albeit to a lesser degree. They found three separate factors — self-selection, algorithmic pre-selection and friend selection — led to lower levels of cross-cutting exposure than for members of society with a random selection of friends.

In 2019, the European Parliament Panel for the Future of Science and Technology published its review of the literature on 'Polarisation and the News Media in Europe'. Its findings summarise best the prevailing wisdom:

> '…as yet, little evidence to support the idea that increased exposure to news featuring like-minded or opposing views leads to the widespread polarisation of attitudes. Although some studies have found that both can strengthen the attitudes of a minority who already hold strong views… Most studies of news use on social media have failed to find evidence of echo chambers and/or 'filter bubbles', where people are over-exposed to like-minded views. Some studies even find evidence that it increases the likelihood of exposure to opposing views'. (European Parliament, 2019, p.3).

5.13 Summary of personalisation

Negroponte's 1995 vision of 'The Daily Me' as a virtual daily newspaper, uniquely customised for every citizen, has come true, via the personalised news content offered by social media sites and news aggregators.

By definition, personalisation narrows the range of stories users receive by selecting only material likely to interest them. Historically, the role of news curation fell to human editors, who decided what stories to offer consumers, but as more young people get their news from digital platforms, the role of the editor is being squeezed.

Algorithmic curation is the process by which artificially intelligent computers use complex mathematical formulae to calculate the future behaviours and preferences of consumers.

Facebook uses an algorithm based on the Vickrey-Clarke-Groves ('VCG') auction, devised by a Nobel Prize winning economist, to help it predict user preferences. It employs electronic cookies to record on-site and off-site web histories; comparing this data with similar data from other users with similar customer journeys.

In 2018, Facebook changed it algorithm to reduce the volume of news traffic from 5 per cent of all Facebook activity to 4 per cent. It did so because the company's Founder Mark Zuckerberg claimed news was leading to 'passive consumption' (Zuckerberg, 2018).

The ‘filter bubble’ is a term, originated from Pariser (2011), describing an environment where users rely heavily on algorithmic selection for their news, thus are fed only ideas and viewpoints that match their own. The key word is ‘filter’, as it describes a process that is not controlled directly by human hands; it is a sieve operated by computer software, programmed to find content the user is likely to consume.

Scholars and practitioners have cautioned against humans putting high trust in engineers who devise these algorithms, which diminish the role of human creativity and serendipity in the choices we make (Funnell, 2012).

The problem of trust was highlighted by a social experiment funded by Facebook, in which they found ‘emotional contagion' was possible on the social network (Kramer, Guillory and Hancock, 2014). Researchers were able to change the emotions expressed by users, by feeding them positive or negative stories. The experiment demonstrated society could be manipulated on a grand scale by using algorithmic curation to feed stories to create desired effects.

The ‘echo chamber’ pre-dates the Internet, and is a bubble where people are surrounded by others who share their opinions:

> ‘…creating a false impression of how widely held… are [those opinions] by the rest of the population’. (European Parliament, 2019, p.6).

Sunstein (2001) was one of the first to warn of ‘echo chambers or information cocoons’, claiming democracy required ‘unplanned, unanticipated encounters’ with people with different sets of opinions to our own.

Whilst Ofcom (2019d) found social media led to people being isolated from views that did not conform to their own, they found younger adults were the group least effected by this. 16-34s were more likely than older people to encounter views online with which they disagreed. This was due partly to young people using more disparate news sources (Flaxman et al., 2016, p.313).

‘Ideological segregation’ is:

> ‘…the expected difference in the conservative shares of news outlets visited by two randomly selected individuals’. (Flaxman et al., 2016, p.300).

Flaxman et al. (2016) concluded social media facilitates filter bubbles and echo chambers; these contribute to ideological segregation, but: ‘their overall effects at this time are somewhat limited’ (Ibid., 313), and it was lower still for people who were not avid news consumers.

DiMaggio, Evans and Bryson (1996) defined polarisation as both a state and a process, a noun and a verb, where people's ideological beliefs are positioned apart. Beam, Hutchens and Hmielowski (2018) found the use of Facebook for news resulted in net de-polarisation, due largely to increased cross-cutting exposure, defined as:

> ‘…the disagreement in viewpoints encountered by individuals in their communication environments’ (Matthes, Knoll, Valenzuela, Hopmann & Von Sikorski, 2019, p.523).

Paradoxically, and directly opposite to the views expressed by critics of the echo chamber theory, Mutz (2002b) found cross-cutting exposure reduced social harmony and deterred political engagement. Moehler & Conroy-Krutz (2016) confirmed it led to lower levels of political participation. And far from altering minds, Bail et al. (2018) found cross-cutting exposure merely entrenched views held at the outset.

Flaxman et al. (2016) found the people most likely to be exposed to cross-cutting ideas were the ones most politically divergent to begin with. However, Heatherly, Lu, and Lee (2017) found cross-cutting exposure had less impact on people with already entrenched political opinions.

Overall, personalisation works as a tool for delivering users content in which they are interested. The fear that personalisation on social media, involving algorithmic curation, will lead to filter bubbles, which create echo chambers, which leads to political polarisation is largely refuted by the literature. In fact, many studies find social media use leads to greater exposure to a wide range of stories and sources, with greater cross-cutting exposure, especially among the young, and less avid news consumers.

5.14 Conclusion on personalisation

There has always been some level of customisation of content in the analog world, but digital technology has made granular levels of personalisation more efficient and ubiquitous. Presently, search engines, social media sites and news aggregators are the primary platforms engaged in news personalisation because they are run by technology companies, not media companies, and it is their technology being employed to sift through the content produced by others. Media companies are at a structural disadvantage in the race towards personalisation delivered via algorithmic curation.

Firstly, news producers are not favourably disposed to personalisation. Whilst BBC News has announced plans for this (BBC, 2020a), the details have not been disclosed, and several of the participants in this research expressed scepticism about the desirability of personalisation in their online services, albeit recognising its inevitability (Chapter 6.10).

Culturally, everything about personalisation is a knife to the heart of a journalist-editor. It substitutes human creativity and professional judgement for zeros and ones, spreadsheets and graphs, cookies and code. McLuhan (1964) said: ‘the medium is the message’, meaning the platform was more important than the content. In human terms, that makes the software engineers who create the platforms more important than the writer-artist-thinkers who ‘merely’ create the content. Personalisation is the mechanism by which to demonstrate who is on top in this relationship. While some, like Ted Striphas, warn of the cultural

power personalisation gives to software engineers (Funnell, 2012), the march towards it is inexorable.

Secondly, personalisation disrupts the news media's business model. Already, consumption of traditional media is in sharp decline among 16-34s; so too are revenues. Online advertising in 2018 made up 57 per cent of all UK advertising revenues (£13,439 million); while TV advertising revenues were down 4 per cent (£4,720 million), and print advertising in newspapers dropped 13.5 per cent (£1,273 million) (Table 5.1).

Google and Facebook took an estimated 61 per cent of all UK online revenue. That is £8.2 billion in 2018; more than the combined revenues of the TV, radio, newspaper and magazine sectors (£7.1 billion). International estimates suggest 13 per cent of all online revenue went to search engines (principally Google); 17 per cent to social media platforms and 30 per cent to online video platforms (principally YouTube). News sites were estimated to take only 7 per cent of all online revenue (Ofcom, 2019f, p.5-6).

Personalisation is one reason for the rapid commercial assent of Google and Facebook, because aside from personalising editorial content, they offer highly targeted, personalised advertising, for which advertisers pay a premium. Meantime, UK broadcast news companies presently are doing zero personalisation on their own platforms. The kind offered presently by the BBC News App is a low-tech form of self-selection, allowing users to pick categories of news to appear in a 'My News' section of the app.

Table 5.1. UK total advertising spend, 2018, by media

UK Total Advertising Spend, 2018 (£millions)				
Media	**2018**	**% Total**	**Year on Year change**	**2017**
Online	£13,439	57.0%	12.3%	£11,965
TV	£4,720	20.0%	-4.1%	£4,922
Direct mail	£1,555	6.6%	-10.7%	£1,741
Newspaper (print)	£1,273	5.4%	-13.5%	£1,471
Out of home	£1,209	5.1%	3.2%	£1,172
Radio	£678	2.9%	2.7%	£660
Magazines	£447	1.9%	-13.5%	£517
Cinema	£254	1.1%	-4.2%	£265
Total	**£23,570**	**100.0%**	3.8%	**£22,710**

Source: Ofcom Communications Market Report, 2019 / AA / Warc Expenditure Report. Figures are CPI adjusted to 2018 prices.

Whilst it can be beneficial for news publishers to personalise content for users who are already on their sites/apps — giving them a better user experience and encouraging them to stay longer — this does not solve the publishers' problem of competing with all the personalisation that takes place at the browser / social media platform level, which is capable of diverting customers away from the news sites. This was demonstrated by Facebook's 2018 algorithm change (Chapter 5.2), which was designed to, and resulted in, a 20 per cent average drop in news traffic on the platform.

On the demand side, personalisation — by definition — delivers content to customers that is of interest and relevance, and so should lead to greater engagement with news (Kümpel, 2018). Users no longer need to search for a needle in a haystack when the algorithm can ensure ‘the news finds me’ (Gil de Zúnīga, Weeks & Ardèvol-Abreu, 2017). Undoubtedly, personalisation makes for a better customer experience.

A problem for news producers is what the public finds interesting and relevant might not be what they (the producers) want to give them; potentially when more news is personalised, this could lead to a decline in consumption of some types of news content.

Channel 4 News, ITV News, Sky News and 5 News agree largely on the type of content they believe 16-34s want, and the style and tone in which they want it delivered (Chapter 6.7). Increased algorithm-led personalisation by the news brands would shine a bright light on these assumptions.

As demonstrated by Netflix’s artwork personalisation (Chapter 5.3), if an artificial intelligence is programmed to grow by machine learning and automatically to curate content in order to maximise viewing, likely there would be unintended consequences. Netflix was accused of racial profiling in the way its personalisation promoted entertainment shows (The Guardian, 2018). If similar techniques were employed for news, the societal impact could be much more significant. Already, Facebook has demonstrated it can manipulate the moods of its users by feeding them ‘happy’ or ‘sad’ stories; a process known as ‘emotional contagion’ (Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014).

One assumes Netflix's artwork personalisation and Facebook's 'emotional contagion' experiment began with benign motivations, but if one adds to either a malevolent actor, the potential societal consequences become incalculable.

Other fears about personalisation have proven less valid. The charge was that increased personalisation would lead to a 'filter bubble' resulting in an 'echo chamber' and greater political polarisation, causing declining political participation and social disharmony. This idea has been propagated like a web virus, seemingly due to tabloid hysteria, intellectual snobbery and self-interest from old media (Chapter 1.0.1).

The 'filter bubble' defined by Pariser (2011) consists of two halves. The 'bubble' necessarily is linked to, and caused by, the 'filter' of algorithmic pre-selection. A 'bubble' in itself — isolated from the causal filter — is virtually identical to Sunstein's 'echo chambers or information cocoons' (Sunstein, 2001).

Whereas social media provides ingredients for filter bubbles and echo chambers to come into existence, both are undermined by social curation (Messing & Westwood, 2014) and the fact social media users use multiple social media platforms and websites; each one with a different algorithm, applying a different filter, creating a different bubble.

If users used one social media platform, or different media channels with a common algorithm, it is possible they would be in a 'filter bubble'. But the minute they use different media with different algorithms, multiple bubbles are created, logically each one reducing the potency of the other. The net effect is

they can cancel each other out. You cannot be trapped inside an ‘information cocoon’, if each day you enter ten different ‘information cocoons’.

Whilst Bakshy, Messing and Adamic (2015) found Facebook users were in an echo chamber, they concluded this was due to self-selection, and only to ‘a lesser degree’ due to algorithmic curation. Firstly; if they were in an echo chamber on Facebook, they would be in a different counteracting echo chamber when they open Twitter, or YouTube. Secondly; self-selection is an analog tool. It is the same as a person deciding to purchase the Daily Mail rather than the Guardian. In fact, the evidence shows the deleterious effects of social media fall largely on older, traditional media users transferring their existing offline behaviours online (Ofcom, 2019d; Flaxman et al., 2016).

There are fewer problems arising from personalisation, if any, among 16-34s and those with low levels of political or news engagement, for whom social media use is associated with increased cross-cutting exposure and de-polarisation (Beam, Hutchens and Hmielowski, 2018).

Even if there were an effective filter bubble or echo chamber, it is questionable this would be a cause of political disharmony. Intuitively, many educated people believe more exposure to different ideas is a good thing (Sunstein, 2001, p.320), but there is plenty of evidence to suggest cross-cutting exposure can have negative consequences for political engagement and democracy. Bail et al. (2018) found Twitter users became more entrenched in their opinions when exposed to cross-cutting ideas. And Mutz (2002b) found when people

encountered political difference in their social networks, it threatened social harmony.

If there is greater political polarisation in society, it is unproven the blame for this lay with personalisation on digital platforms, as opposed to other factors in wider society. News represents only 4 per cent of content consumed on Facebook (Zuckerberg, 2018), so news does not have a monopoly as a source of information about the world. It is just one of many factors that might contribute to the level of social harmony, or disharmony.

Ironically, news junkies of different political complexions mirror each other's news consumption behaviours. Those who consume the most news are the ones with the greatest cross-cutting exposure and the ones most likely to be ideologically segregated (Flaxman et al., 2016).

By this logic, if nobody consumed any news at all, society would be less polarised, with people living in a blissful ignorance of all the things about which they should be polarised. Indeed, this is the rationale of every authoritarian regime for controlling its media, and it works. If the objective is less polarisation, one solution might be less news — a remedy few may wish to countenance.

Chapter 6
How have news providers responded to changing habits of young adults?

6.0 Introduction

I approached the United Kingdom's five largest television news broadcasters — BBC News, ITV News, Channel 4 News, 5 News and Sky News — to enquire into their experiences of news consumption among those aged 16-34 years old on digital and social media platforms.

Four commercial broadcasters agreed to participate, with Editors-in-Chief or Heads of Digital agreeing to be interviewed personally by me on multiple occasions by email and telephone, also agreeing to complete a questionnaire, which involved disclosing internal audience research data.

6.1 BBC News: non-participation

Uniquely, BBC News declined to participate in this research. This declination came during the week Ofcom published its critical 'Review of BBC News and Current Affairs, 2019 Report' (Ofcom, 2019b). The report — summarised in Chapter 6.12 — painted a negative picture of BBC News' efforts to appeal to younger audiences. BBC News referred me to this report and it prevented individual news programme editors from contributing to this research.

The BBC is a public body which, in 2019, received £3,690 million in licence fee income (BBC, 2019, p.90). Clause 12 (1) of its Charter states:

> ‘The BBC must observe high standards of openness and seek to maximise transparency and accountability’. (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2016).

In contrast, the four commercial broadcasters have no such public charter and receive no licence fee income, yet they engaged wholeheartedly with this research, while the BBC did not.

6.1 Methodology

The four participating news organisations (the ‘participants’) were each emailed the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 8.0); Consent Form (Appendix 8.1) and Questionnaire (Appendix 8.2).

The Participant Information Sheet stated: ‘The company is the participant, not any individual’.

The participants signed and returned the Consent Forms during October, November and December 2019, during which time I began a series of email and telephone conversations with the nominated Editors or Heads of Digital. Some participants wrote long emails with detailed answers to questions in the Questionnaire. These were followed up by me with ancillary questions, by telephone and email. For the telephone interviews, I typed notes contemporaneously of the respondents’ oral answers. I would then email the respondents my write-up and seek confirmation of accuracy.

In January 2020, after I had analysed all the responses, I sent each participant draft sections of this Chapter 7, redacted to contain only references to the

individual participant; including all charts, statistics and quotations, seeking comments, corrections and approval for publication.

The Participant Information Sheet had stated: ‘News organisations will be anonymised, unless you give permission for specific citations’. My write-up did make numerous citations of named news organisations. Consequently, the respondents might be identifiable from their job titles. I drew this to the attention of the respondents and gave them the option for me to remove references to named organisations or job titles. However, each participant emailed their approval for all sections of Chapter 7 referencing them, with only one or two minor corrections of facts.

In January 2020, I approached the research agency, Childwise for use of some of its data on news consumption by children aged 9-16 (used in Chapter 3.10). Although it was not, strictly speaking, a participant in the same way as the news broadcasters, it too was sent all the above forms; it signed a Consent Form, and was sent relevant extracts of my write-up for approval, which it gave in February 2020.

In February 2020, I approached Ofcom and sent it a copy of all the charts, tables and statistics of its, that I had included in this thesis, including specifying where I had done additional analysis and extrapolations from its figures. Ofcom emailed it was content with the use of data and the referencing.

The Participant Information Sheet had given each participant the right to ‘withdraw its consent to participate in the research’ up until a deadline of 30 April 2020. The deadline passed with no withdrawals.

6.2 A brief overview of the Questionnaire

There were nine questions in the Questionnaire (Appendix 8.2), asking about the participants' experiences of news consumption behaviours of audiences aged 16-34. The questions were purposefully broad and open, allowing participants to be expansive with their responses, both by way of narrative and — optionally — by providing audience statistics.

The questions could be broken down into three sections: Questions 1-4 sought an overview of the market, asking about the quantity of news consumption, how, when, where, and the styles and genres of news sought by 16-34s. Questions 5-6 dealt with audience engagement, such as sharing, commenting and participation. Questions 7-9 dealt with the participants' organisational, strategic and commercial responses to the market conditions.

The participants were told they needed only to answer the questions with which they felt comfortable or knowledgeable enough to answer. No participant answered all nine questions. In fact, Question 3 — 'What, if any, difference is there in when and where… news is consumed by 16-34s, compared to older age groups?' — proved redundant. And answers to Question 5 on engagement were subsumed into answers for Question 2 on consumption behaviours.

6.3 A brief overview of the participants

The four participating news organisations have somewhat different target audiences and — in some cases — distinct, legally defined broadcasting remits. Three of the four news services are produced by Independent Television News Limited ('ITN') for ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. These three

broadcasters — along with BBC and Welsh language channel, S4C — are known collectively as ‘public service broadcasters’, or PSBs. This is because each publicly awarded licence to broadcast grants monopoly rights to transmit on certain television frequencies. In exchange, a common condition of these licences is broadcasters are obliged to deliver an amount of news and current affairs programming, as a public service.

The fourth participant, Sky News, is not a PSB. However, all four news services are regulated to the same standards and rules by Ofcom, specifically by the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, which requires:

> ‘…that news, in whatever form, is reported with due accuracy and presented with due impartiality’. (Ofcom, 2019c, p.28).

It is important to note: Ofcom regulates the television channels and not the news producers. In practice, this distinction is not hugely significant, as the only external producer here — ITN — has been producing news for ITV since 1955, and it is likely an implicit, if not explicit, term in each of its commercial contracts for it to ensure programming is compliant with the Code.

6.3.1 ITV

ITV launched on 22 September 1955 as the UK’s first, commercial, terrestrial broadcaster, in competition with BBC1. Later operated by fifteen regional licensees and a national breakfast-time licensee; today ITV Plc is the owner of all but two ITV licences, namely those covering Scotland, held by STV Group Plc.

As a brand, ITV is known as a home for popular entertainment programmes aimed at mass audiences, like *Coronation Street, X Factor* and *I'm a Celebrity… Get Me Out of Here!* Consequently, ITV News — as a sub-brand — inherits an audience and brand reputation from the popular programming that surrounds it.

6.3.2 Channel 4

Channel 4 is the UK's fourth national, free-to-air, terrestrial television network, operated by Channel Four Television Corporation. It was created by the Broadcasting Act 1981 with a specific remit to be distinctive from the three other terrestrial television channels (at the time, BBC1, BBC2 and ITV). It launched on 2 November 1982 and its remit was subsequently updated by the Communications Act 2003 to include a duty to provide:

> 'News and current affairs… that appeals to the tastes and interests of older children and young adults… [and] distribution of relevant media content by means of a range of different types of electronic communications networks'. (Communications Act 2003, c198A).

As a consequence of this overt statutory remit, uniquely among the participants, it is core to Channel 4 News to target viewers aged 16-34, especially on digital platforms. Despite the news brand being positioned as more upmarket and esoteric than the other news brands, it has been very successful in engaging this age group. From data publicly available on the social media platforms, Channel 4 News has more than double the number of

Facebook followers (4.8 million) and YouTube subscribers (1,330,000) of ITV News (2.3 million and 531,000, respectively). (Table 6.2).

6.3.3 Channel 5

Channel 5 Broadcasting Limited operates the UK's fifth national, free-to-air, terrestrial television network, providing general entertainment programming. Channel 5 was launched on 30 March 1997 and is owned by the US telecommunications company, ViacomCBS, the owner of MTV and CBS News. Measured by audience size, Channel 5 is the smallest of the terrestrial broadcasters, accounting for a 3.9 per cent share of UK television viewing (BARB, 2020a). Consequently, Channel 5's news programming, styled as '5 News', has the smallest audience and — it claims — the smallest operating budget among the participants.

6.3.4 Sky News

Sky News was the UK's first 24-hour-a-day rolling news channel, launched on 5 February 1989, eight years before the launch of BBC News Channel, on 9 November 1997. Founded by Australian-born media tycoon, Rupert Murdoch, Sky News is now owned by Sky Group, part of US telecommunications company, Comcast, which also owns NBC News in the United States. As at December 2019, Sky News was available in 26 million UK TV homes, approximately 93 per cent of all UK TV homes (BARB, 2020b).

Sky News differs from the other participants in three material ways:

1. Sky News is the only participant that is both the in-house producer and publisher of its own content. It does not outsource production of its news programming to an independent production company, like ITN. Consequently, Sky News' management has the advantage of being able to make singular decisions, without any potential conflict of interest between it as a producer and it as a broadcaster. Whereas for ITV News, Channel 4 News and 5 News, each has two layers of management — a production team and a broadcaster team — located in separate offices. Decisions about digital strategy ultimately belong to the broadcaster, who pays the bills and owns the news brand, not to the producer. However close the relationships are in practice — and I have no evidence to say they are not close — inevitably, the bifurcation of roles introduces hurdles for some players that Sky News does not have to navigate.

2. Sky News does just one thing — news — whereas ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5 primarily are entertainment channels, broadcasting multiple genres of programming, of which news is one small category. So, when formulating a digital strategy, Sky News only has to think about what is good for news, whereas the other participants must develop plans that fit into a broader channel strategy. Sky News told me:

   > 'Sky News is editorially independent of the rest of Sky, so any news decisions don't need alignment with other Sky channels'.

3. Sky News is a 24-hour-a-day rolling news channel. This has a different organisational structure and editorial way of thinking than the other participants, whose primary output consists of scripted bulletins, with a series of edited packages. A rolling news channel can re-edit the same story multiple times across the day, and come at it from numerous angles. It is unburdened by the clock. It can crash through commercial breaks and re-structure its running order on the fly. Unpredictability is an everyday feature of rolling news, whereas it is a bug for scheduled news programmes. Most significantly, because Sky News is outputting programming all-day long, it has more airtime to fill than the other participants, so it must produce a greater quantity of content.

6.4 Participants' digital and social media presence

Naturally, all the major news broadcasters have a digital presence. All have pages on the four main social media platforms — Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. However, not all have websites or mobile applications (Table 6.1). 5 News has neither. It has not yet decided to invest significantly in distribution on digital platforms. Channel 4 News does not have a dedicated mobile application; it has a news section on the general 'All 4' Channel 4 mobile app.

Table 6.1 Major UK news broadcasters' web & mobile presence

News Broadcaster	Website	Mobile App
BBC News	bbc.com/news/uk	Yes
Sky News	news.sky.com	Yes
Channel 4 News	channel4.com/news	No
ITV News	itv.com/news	Yes
5 News	No	No

Table 6.2 shows numbers for the social media presence of the major news broadcasters. As at May 2020, BBC News had a greater number of subscribers and followers — of all ages, globally — on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram than all other UK news broadcasters, put together.

Table 6.2 Major UK news broadcasters' social media users

News Broadcaster	Total	Facebook Followers	Twitter Followers	YouTube Subscribers	Instagram Followers
BBC News	**84,447,000**	52,997,000	11,000,000	7,550,000	12,900,000
Sky News	**18,100,000**	8,700,000	6,100,000	2,350,000	950,000
Channel 4 News	**8,558,000**	4,800,000	2,300,000	1,330,000	128,000
ITV News	**5,438,000**	2,300,000	2,300,000	531,000	307,000
5 News	**528,900**	423,000	24,900	76,800	4,200
Total	**117,071,900**	**69,220,000**	**21,724,900**	**11,837,800**	**14,289,200**
Percentage	**100%**	**59%**	**19%**	**10%**	**12%**
Excluding BBC News					
Total	**32,624,900**	**16,223,000**	**10,724,900**	**4,287,800**	**1,389,200**
Percentage	**100%**	**50%**	**33%**	**13%**	**4%**

Source: News brands' public pages on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram - data accessed 19 May 2020

If we exclude BBC News and look solely at the participants, Sky News had the biggest combined social media following (18.1 million), followed by Channel 4 News (8.6 million), ITV News (5.4 million) and 5 News (0.5 million).

Overall, Facebook was the most important social media platform for the news broadcasters, accounting for 50 per cent of participants' social media followers. After Facebook, the next most popular platform was Twitter (33 per cent), then YouTube (13 per cent), then Instagram (4 per cent).

The immediate observations from Table 6.2 are the relative over-achievement of Channel 4 News, given the size of its broadcast news audience, and the relative under-achievement of 5 News, due to its admitted lack of investment.

This brief overview of the digital landscape for news broadcasters sets the framework for the participants' responses to the Questionnaire (Chapter 8.2).

6.5 Questionnaire #1 — Quantity of news

What quantity of news do people aged 16-34 years old consume on your web, mobile app and social media platforms, compared to older age groups?

Many of the participants had difficulties answering this question because they do not collect, or have access to, this level of granularity in the audience data across some of the digital platforms on which their content resides. They know overall audience numbers for reach, views, followers, subscribers and duration of visits, but in many instances they do not know much about who precisely is in the audience, by age group. Some expressed scepticism about the credibility

of audience data for users of websites because, it was argued: how do you know how many people are looking at a computer screen and who those people are?

Broadcasters' Audience Research Board ('BARB') is the UK broadcast industry's research agency for audience data. However, BARB does not cover platforms like YouTube and Facebook, so its data cannot help news editors shape fully a digital strategy. For this, they have to rely on data from the social media platforms, their own web platforms, and any additional sample surveys they may commission.

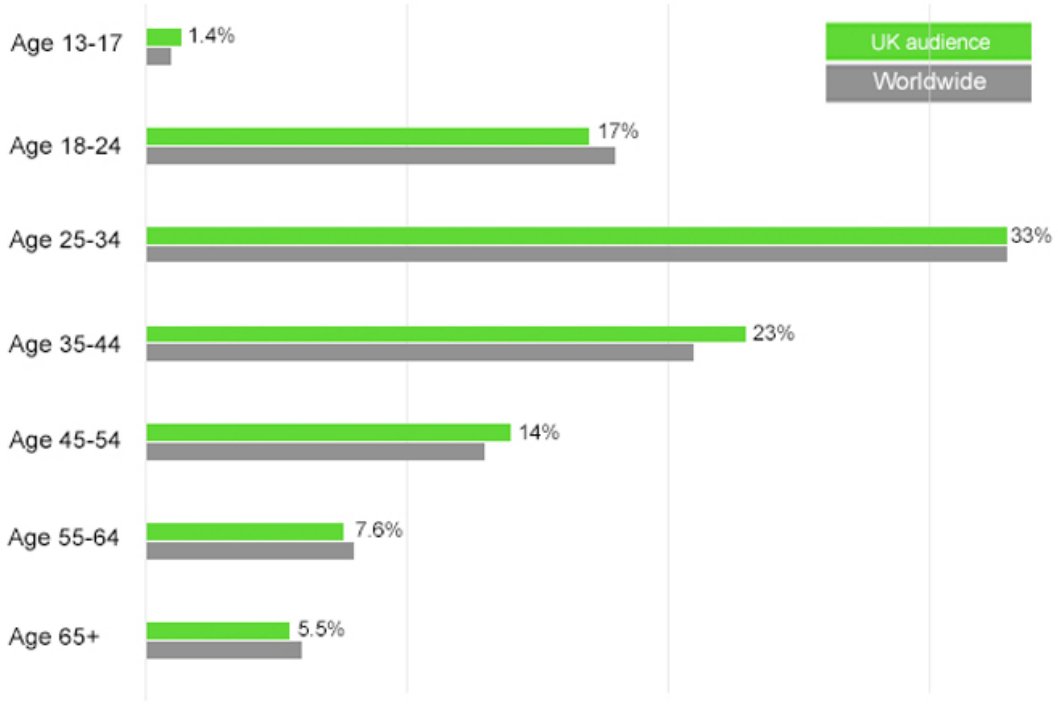
ITV News said it does not monitor age demographics of traffic to its website, www.itv.com/news. For Facebook, ITV News' biggest audience is aged 25-34 years old. ITV News said it has been actively targeting younger viewers on Instagram, a fact which is evidenced by the number of followers it has on that platform (307,000) (Table 6.2).

In the year from 1 October 2018 to 30 September 2019, Channel 4 News reported its online content was watched for over a billion minutes (1,012,045,397) by viewers around the world. The majority (51 per cent) of this time was from viewers aged 13-34 years old. The age profile among UK viewers was virtually identical to that among viewers worldwide (Figure 6.1). Specifically, Channel 4 News' single biggest age group of UK online viewers was between 25-34 years old (33 per cent).

Online, Channel 4 News is disproportionately favoured by young adult viewers. Only 27 per cent of its 'Watch Time' was from those aged over 45 years old.

This finding is consistent with Channel 4 News also reporting the highest proportion of 16-34s of any public service broadcaster, across all platforms.

Figure 6.1. Channel 4 News: 'Watch Time' - online minutes viewed, by age



Source: Channel 4 News, for period October 1 2018 to September 30 2019

Sky News reported its November 2019 audience on digital platforms was significantly younger than that on broadcast television. Figure 6.2 shows the percentage of Sky News users, who are aged 13-34, by platform. The youngest audience was on Snapchat, with 90 per cent of users aged 13-34. YouTube had the second youngest audience, with 58 per cent of videos viewed by 13-34s, followed by Instagram (53 per cent aged 13-34).

The majority of Sky News' Facebook users (55 per cent) were aged over 34 years old; its oldest audiences were on the Sky News App (72 per cent aged over 34) and on the website — news.sky.com — where 81 per cent of users were aged over 34.

Figure 6.2. Sky News: Digital audience aged 13-34, by platform

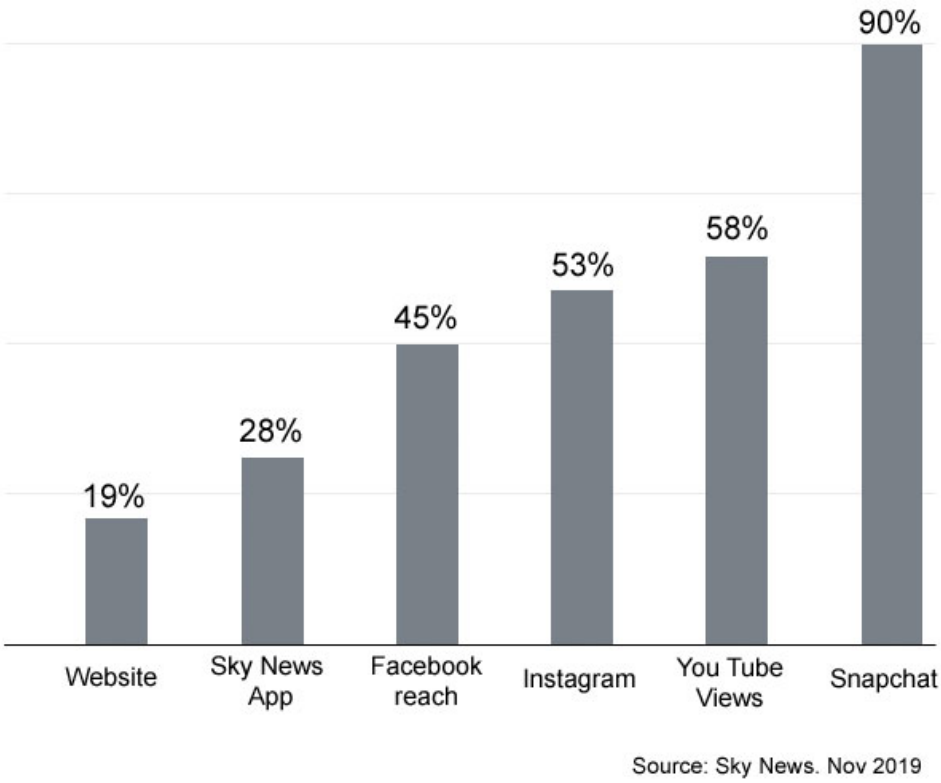


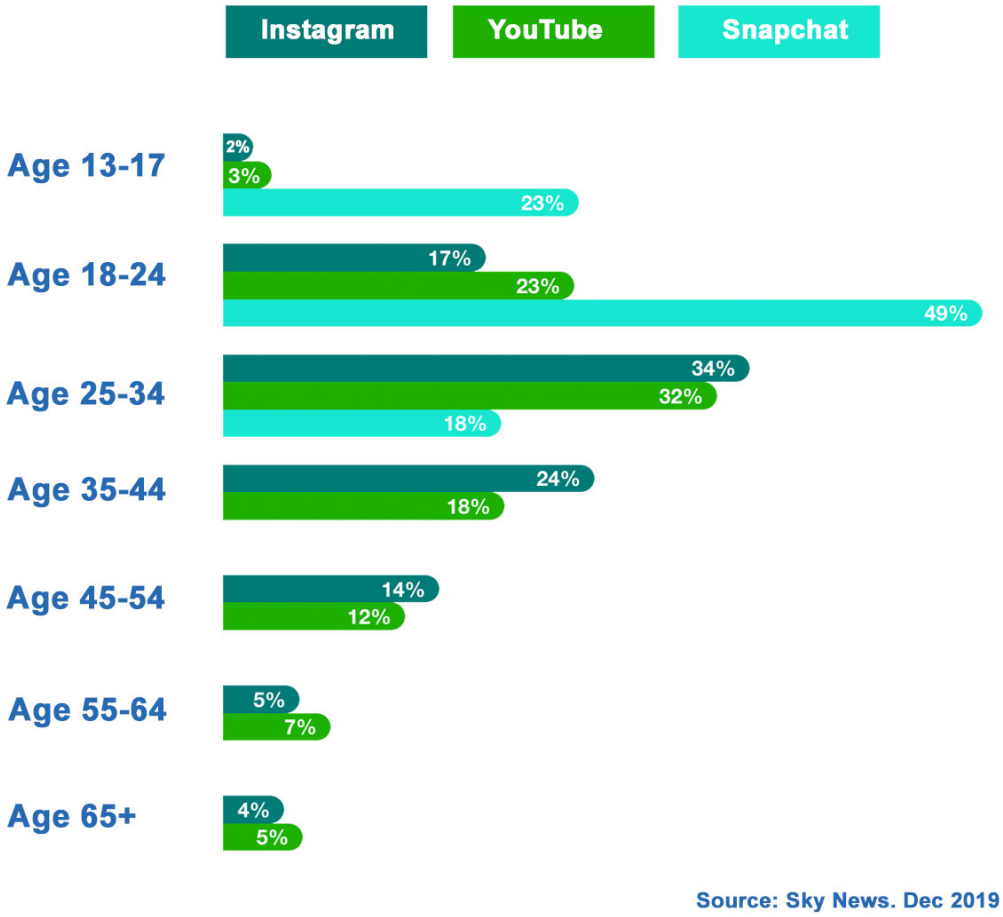
Figure 6.3 shows a further breakdown of the Sky News audience on three of the social media platforms — Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat — in December 2019.

On Instagram, its biggest audience was aged 25-34 (34 per cent of the total), followed by those aged 35-44 (24 per cent), and those aged 18-24 (17 per cent).

There was a similar age profile for Sky News on YouTube, where 25-34s represented the single largest user group, accounting for 32 per cent of video views. They were followed by 18-24s, with 23 per cent of views, and 35-44s with 18 per cent of views.

Snapchat, generally, is considered a platform for Generation Z (aged under 25), rather than millennials; this was reflected in the figures for Sky News, where 23 per cent of its Snapchat users were aged 13-17; the largest group was aged 18-24, comprising 49 per cent of all users. Only 10 per cent of Sky News' Snapchat users were aged over 34 years.

Figure 6.3. Sky News: Social media audience breakdown by age



Source: Sky News. Dec 2019

The main Channel 5 news programme on television — '5 News at 5' — appeals to an older than average audience. 48 per cent of its broadcast viewers are aged over 64 years old. Only 9 per cent of broadcast viewers are aged 16-34, whereas this age group comprises 24.5 per cent of the UK population (Table 2.1). So, when it comes to attracting young adult viewers on digital and social media platforms, 5 News starts from a low base (Table 6.3).

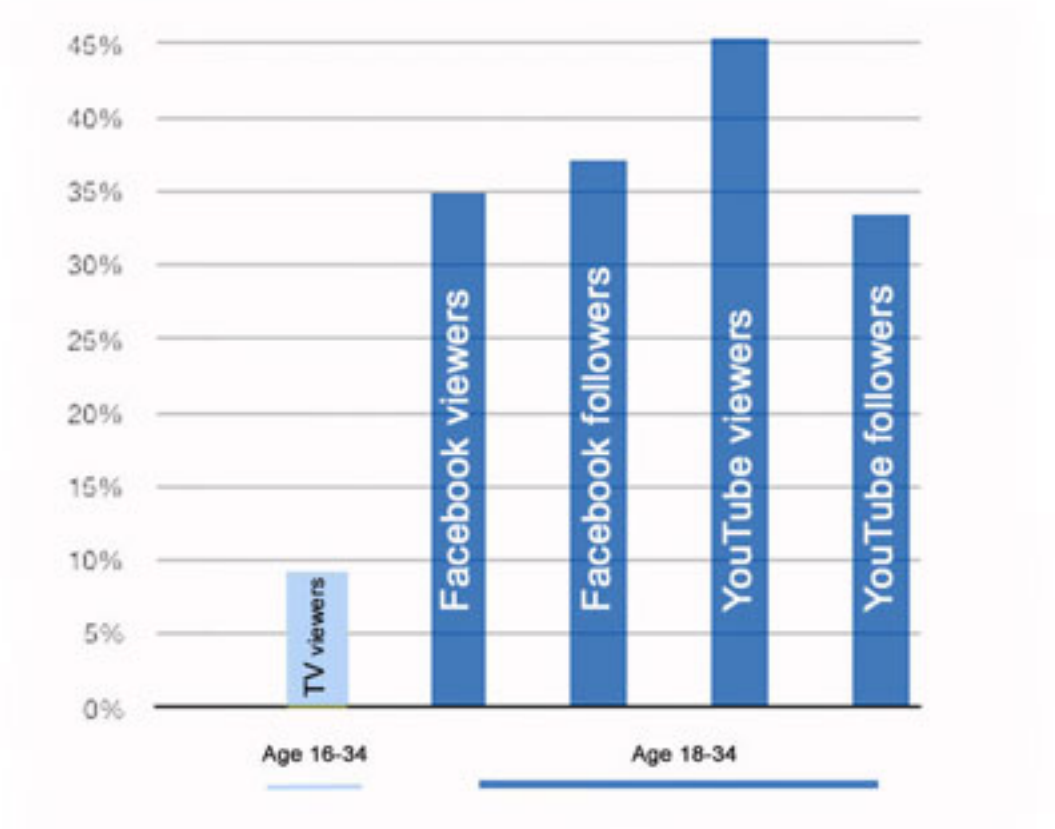
Table 6.3. 5 News: Breakdown of TV audience by age and sex

Target	5 News at 5	5 News Tonight at 1830	5 News Update at 1955	5 News at 20:58	5 News Weekend
Men	37%	36%	52%	45%	48%
Women	60%	58%	44%	52%	47%
Children	4%	6%	4%	4%	5%
16-34s	9%	9%	9%	9%	9%
35-44s	9%	12%	8%	10%	9%
45-54s	16%	22%	16%	16%	16%
55-64s	14%	17%	19%	19%	19%
65-74s	20%	17%	21%	21%	20%
75+	28%	16%	24%	22%	22%

Source: 5 News. Average over past 13 weeks. [delivered Nov8 2019]

The picture was different for 5 News on Facebook and YouTube, where — in October/November 2019 — it reached three to four times the proportion of young adults aged 18-34 than it did on television. 45 per cent of its YouTube views and 37 per cent of its Facebook followers came from this age group. (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4. 5 News: Consumption by users aged 18-34 years



Source: 5 News. October/November 2019

6.6 Questionnaire #2 — Difference in consumption

What, if any, difference is there in how news is consumed by 16-34s, compared to older age groups?

One Head of Digital conceded:

> ‘Traditional scheduled news is for older audiences, not young audiences. Young people want to consume when they like; on the way home from the pub, or on the way to school or college’.

Channel 4 News reported significant differences in how age groups consume news, with older audiences having a preference for live newscasts. Table 6.4 shows viewers over 34 years old had a preference for watching live streams, as opposed to video on demand (‘VOD’). Overall, 43 per cent of all of Channel 4 News’ live minutes online were consumed by those aged 13-34, while this age group consumed 52 per cent of all VOD minutes.

Table 6.4. Channel 4 News: Share of digital minutes viewed by age

Age group	Live stream YouTube	VOD Video on Demand
13–17 years	0%	1%
18–24 years	10%	18%
25–34 years	33%	33%
35–44 years	25%	21%
45–54 years	15%	13%
55–64 years	9%	8%
65+ years	8%	6%

Source: Channel 4 News, for period October 1 2018 to September 30 2019

The nature of VOD is it tends to consists of standalone individual video stories, whereas live streams tend to consist of full-length programmes. So, the figures from Channel 4 News point to younger audiences watching news in bite-size pieces, rather than programmes that contain multifarious stories.

The temptation among television executives is to see this viewing pattern as a failure, or something about which they should be embarrassed and try to hide. An alternative is to embrace it as evolution; neither good nor bad, merely a new set of facts, to which producers and broadcasters have to adjust their commercial and editorial strategies.

Another editor's characterisation of the 16-34 audience informed my proposed taxonomy of news consumption (Table 2.2). He said: 16-34s can be dissected into two groups. The first group were those with an active intention to discover more about a story or issue; they will search for it on Google and, from the options presented, click on a reliable news brand for elucidation. They will spend a lot of time viewing content and will return frequently. This type of viewer is much sought after by news producers. In my taxonomy, I classify this behaviour as 'Diligent'.

The editor's second group of viewers, I classify as exhibiting 'Promiscuous' behaviour. They will stumble casually across news stories, getting it where they can. They are brand agnostic, not loyal to any news service and will surf stories superficially and sporadically, not necessarily paying much attention. Likely, they might be swiping through Instagram pictures of a favourite celebrity when

a news story appears, adjacent. The story has found them, not the other way around. It might have arrived through a number of routes: —

(i) because the news topic matches a topic they have previously searched for, or watched;

(ii) because a friend shared it with them;

(iii) because the news provider has paid money to Instagram to find a particular demographic and serve the story to it.

Hitherto, the strategy for attracting audiences for television news has consisted of marketing a channel brand or an individual programme brand; also scheduling popular entertainment programmes before or after news bulletins. Among 16-34s, the customer journey for accessing news on mobile is completely different to the traditional pathway for broadcast TV. Instead of young people searching actively for news stories, it is the news story that searches for them (Gil de Zúnīga et al., 2017). Because of this passive consumer journey, awareness and trust in a news brand is less of a consideration, and do not translate automatically to viewership of content, at least not for the ‘Promiscuous’ type of consumption.

6.7 Questionnaire #4 — Difference in genres and styles

What, if any, difference is there in the genres and styles of news content chosen by 16-34s, compared to older age groups?

‘Human stories do better on social media’, according to ITV News, which defined this genre as:

> ‘…feature pieces, not hard news, not miserable things. Stories that offer a solution or emotion that people can hook onto. Stories that make you feel something, other than negative’.

This latter point about news being too often perceived as negative was echoed by other editors, who said younger audiences bemoan the fact news appears mostly to cover violence, death and disaster; all the worse aspects of human existence. The old journalistic adage of: ‘If it bleeds, it leads’ does not seem to resonate with younger audiences.

Aside from covering actual wars, the language of news is littered with fighting talk that frames arguments as binary, with one side in confrontation with another. Words like: ‘showdown’, ‘clash’, ‘split’, ‘axe’ and ‘challenge' are peppered across news bulletins. Whilst journalists might argue they are merely covering the world as it is, actually they are choosing which elements of the world to cover, and then using an editorial style that amplifies the negative.

That is not to say news has to edit out disharmony in order to appeal to young audiences. All participants were keen to say they try to tackle serious stories in a more rounded way; at times, referencing a positive angle. For example, ITV News has a strand called ‘The Rundown’, created for 14-17 year olds, available on Instagram Stories, Facebook Stories and the ITV News website. When it covered a hurricane in the Caribbean, its editor said, it did so by telling the story of how some people were helping others caught up in the disaster. This style, it argued, resonates more with the show’s young audience. It still reports the awful truth of the storm, while showing an uplifting side of humanity.

5 News' Editor told me:

> 'We like to cover positive news stories. Often, it's ordinary people doing extraordinary things. We believe these editorial characteristics appeal to younger viewers'.

5 News has its main weekday bulletin, '5 News at 5', at 17:00. Almost two-thirds of this audience (62 per cent) is older than 55 years old. 67 per cent belong to the (lower) C2DE socio-economic demographic, and 60 per cent are female. Overall, the typical viewer could be described as: a northern, working class, older woman. So, the style and tone of the stories covered on '5 News at 5' are reflective of this principal audience member.

For the later bulletin, '5 News Tonight' at 18:30, the audience is younger and, the Editor says, she tends to be more experimental. For example, they have carried many stories on identity and diversity issues. These stories are then placed onto 5 News' social media accounts — on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube — where, as much as 45 per cent of the audience is aged 16-34.

Whilst 5 News does not target expressly the 16-34 age group, it believes its tone of voice and overall style of coverage, which is to focus on people rather than process or policy, appeals to young adult viewers. For example, for a story about a rise in rough sleeping, instead of reporting this just as a problem, featuring interviews with politicians and think tank experts, 5 News' style is to tell the story through the eyes — and mouth — of a homeless person, or an activist, who is actually doing something about it.

5 News' position appears to echo the sentiments of ITV News about younger audiences seeking positivity and activism, not doom and gloom. 5 News pointed also to campaigning issues as another ingredient. These are not necessarily campaigns by the news organisation itself, but coverage of campaigners on issues that are of particular interest to 16-34s, like identity politics, diversity and housing.

One editor told me:

> 'For young people, famous people doing stuff is news'.

They added: many young people see the world through the eyes of celebrities and influencers. So, if you can do a story with a celebrity hook, it will engage more young people than the same story without a celebrity.

ITV News said this does not mean dumbing down the news or doing fluffy stories about trivia. It is more a reference to serious stories with an active celebrity element. Celebrity, in fact, opens a whole world of serious story possibilities. For example, 'Kim Kardashian West on slimming pills' is an opportunity to cover eating disorders, or quack medicines sold on the Internet. 'Footballer Mesit Ozil criticises China' offers the chance to cover China's treatment of its minority Muslim community of Uyghurs.

There appears to be a sweet spot where celebrity, big issues and campaign-activism combine to make news stories hugely popular with 16-34s. Climate change is an obvious example of this. It has countless celebrity campaigners like Swedish teenager, Greta Thunberg and actor, Leonardo DiCaprio, who are

admired by millions, and who often stage news events on the topic. ITV News produced a series on climate change called ‘Earth on the Edge’ which, it says, was hugely successful among 16-34s on its social media channels.

There are some news genres that are difficult to sell to an audience of 16-34s. Stories about business and financial markets do not work very well, because they are often perceived as not relevant to the lives of young people. However, if it is a story about a large, local employer laying off staff in their town, or a story with consumer relevance, like Boeing grounding its fleet of 737 Max aircraft, then it can cut through.

One editor said: 16-34s are not engaging with many long running hard news stories like Brexit, partly because the style of conventional news storytelling assumes wrongly the audience has pre-knowledge of key facts. So, viewers cannot understand a story unless they had been following the issue for a long time. One young viewer was quoted, telling a broadcaster:

> ‘Brexit is like tuning into Episode 4 of Season 7 of a long-running series’.

In other words, it does not make sense unless you have been watching for the past several years; you understand all the jargon, and know who are all the characters.

The solution, according to ITV News, is stories need to be self-contained with a beginning, a middle and an end.

For Channel 4 News, the problem also is one of the formal style of traditional news presentation being off-putting to younger viewers. It said: the stories it

puts on social media are: ‘more conversational, more approachable, less formalised’. It pays close attention to analysing audience data from the various digital platforms, seeing which stories perform well, and using this to inform decisions on how to choose and style future stories.

What are those styles? The answer is abstract and intangible, summed up as the product of a hundred different innovations and methods.

Channel 4 News said:

> ‘The strategies are the collective knowledge of all of our producers about what works for YouTube — by being on YouTube, by watching lots of YouTube videos, by being platform natives, and by caring deeply about being a friendly neighbour on YouTube, not a drive-by organisation that looks out of place on a platform with so many voices’.

6.7.1 Explainers

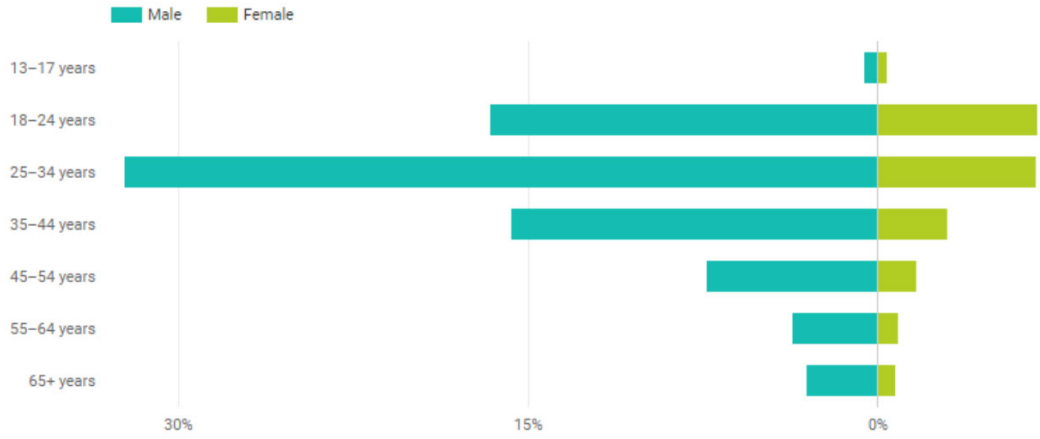
A common format used by most news organisations is ‘explainers’. These are stories whose purpose is to elucidate complex matters of public policy, such as ‘What is impeachment?' or ‘What is a customs union?’. They are usually short-form videos (1-3 minutes in duration) and primarily for web and social media.

Channel 4 News has several explainer strands, which are particularly successful on YouTube, but do not perform well on Twitter, where the broadcaster found shorter, impactful bites are more effective.

One strand is called ‘Brexit Explained’, of which, titles include ‘What happens when the UK leaves the EU?' and ‘How could a No Deal Brexit affect you?’.

In total, all the videos in this strand amassed 27 million minutes of viewing from the year commencing 1 October 2018, with 63 per cent of viewers aged 18-34. The largest group was aged 25-34, accounting for 39 per cent of views (Figure 6.5).

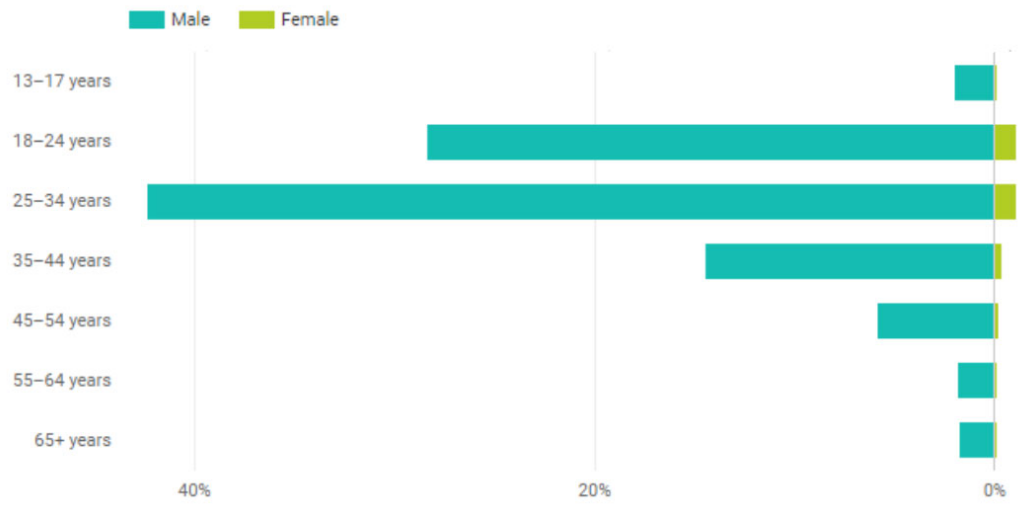
Figure 6.5. Channel 4 News: ‘Brexit Explained’ views on YouTube, by age and sex



Source: Channel 4 News. ‘Brexit Explained’ videos, time consumed on YouTube. Oct 1 2018-Sep 30 2019.

Another popular Channel 4 News explainer strand on YouTube — ‘FactCheck Explains’ — got 2.0 million views, and was watched for 12.1 million minutes in the same time period (as above). Viewers aged 18-34 accounted for 73 per cent of the views. Within this number, those aged 25-34 again were the largest group, 44 per cent (Figure 6.6).

Figure 6.6. Channel 4 News: ‘FactCheck Explains’ views on YouTube, by age and sex



Source: Channel 4 News. ‘FactCheck Explains’ videos, time consumed on YouTube. Oct 1 2018-Sep 30 2019.

Channel 4 News outlined a few common traits it found would boost performance of its explainer videos.

1. Video title, headline

> ‘It’s… about writing something that reads for humans, works for SEO [search engine optimisation], looks ‘YouTubey' in that it doesn't scream that it is a news story, or an explainer created by a news organisation, but seems approachable, human and not overly complex. This headline must give an honest and true, full account of the video, but also do justice to the drama and jeopardy of the news story, without screaming out for attention’. (Channel 4 News).

This latter point is not an attempt to disguise the story is about news. Instead, it is a self-conscious effort not to use conventional news cliches — journalese — and all the oft-repeated phrases and styles that are common in newspapers and television news; words like ‘reveal', ‘exclusive', etc. Instead, they attempt a style that is more informal and casual.

Channel 4 News has found each platform has a certain type of content that performs better than others. It aims to understand this and translate it into its own style, while not compromising the quality of the journalism; ensuring consistency of brand values across all platforms.

2. Thumbnail image

> ‘It’s about the right picture, the right face, the right contrast, the right brightness, the right framing, the right words, the right editorial sense, the right level of insight, accessibility and provocation’. (Channel 4 News).

Thumbnails are the still images that represent and promote the video stories on web and social platforms. Thumbnails are the gateway to the viewing experience, the front page of the newspaper, the cover of the book. They are the first — and most important — opportunity to attract interest from potential viewers. Channel 4 News added:

> ‘The quality of these images is one of the primary determiners of whether someone will engage with your content on YouTube. So, we try to mirror certain strategies used by YouTubers and successful native YouTube channels in order to drive audiences to our content’.

One of those styles is to write the video title in large, bold typography over the thumbnail image itself. This static image is what users see before deciding whether to click to watch the video. (Figure 6.7).

Notably, neither Channel 4 News, nor any of the other broadcasters, spoke of adopting Netflix’s concept of artwork personalisation (Chapter 5.3), where different users receive different thumbnail images, depending on their persona. However, it is noted this is not technically possible on (third party) platforms, unless specific content is being served to individual users.

Figure 6.7. Channel 4 News: 'FactCheck Explains' thumbnails

3. Vertical video

Table 6.5 shows a breakdown of Channel 4 News' online minutes viewed, by device. The single most important device was the mobile phone, accounting for 41 per cent of all minutes viewed.

Table 6.5. Channel 4 News: Online minutes viewed, by device

Device type	Percentage
Mobile phone	41%
Computer	31%
TV	16%
Tablet	9%
Game Console	3%

Source: Channel 4 News, for period October 1 2018 to September 30 2019

Given the importance of mobile phones, a question arises about the physical dimensions of the video images seen on those devices. Most broadcast television is filmed and transmitted in dimensions of 1920 pixels across the horizontal and 1080 pixels, vertically; referred to as ‘1920 x 1080’, ‘16:9’, ’high definition' or ‘HD’. In other words, television images are filmed in landscape mode, almost twice as wide as they are high.

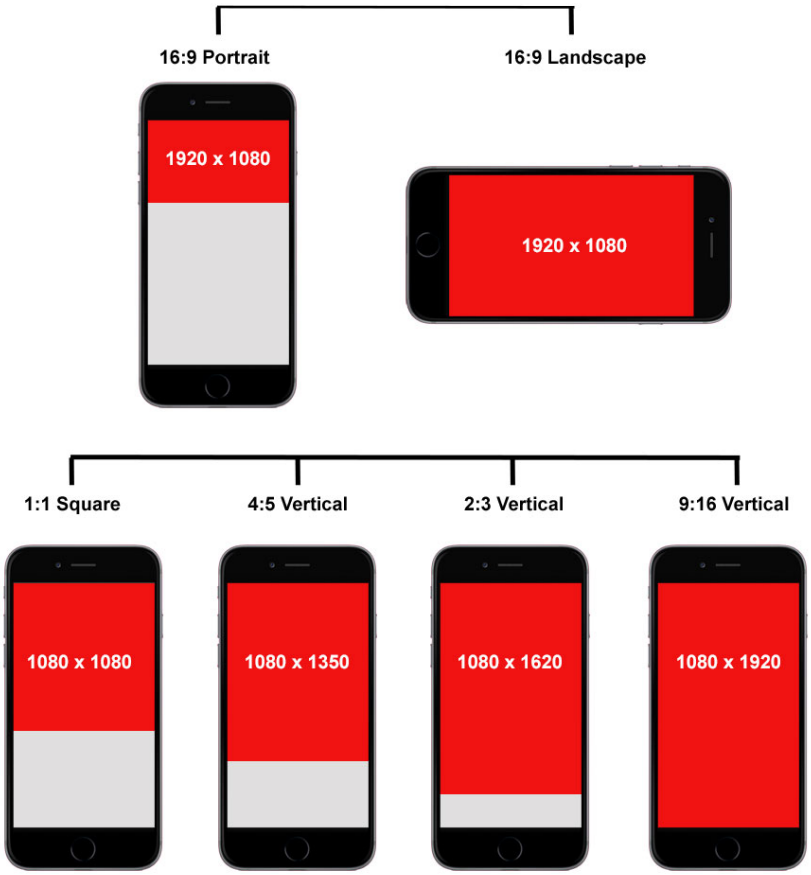
However, mobile telephones are designed to be used in portrait mode (held vertically). This means — by default — a standard 16:9 video fills only one-third of the vertical screen. Mobile phone users need to turn their phones through ninety degrees to see an 16:9 video in fullscreen mode.

In 2017, Snapchat reported phone users held their phones vertically 94 per cent of the time. It was speculated this was because users like to have one hand free; generally two hands are required to hold and operate a phone held horizontally. Whatever the reason, Snapchat discovered:

> ‘Our viewers prefer vertical… We’ve seen a nine-times-higher engagement rate with vertical rather than horizontal video’. (Jefferson, 2015).

Sky News also observed higher viewer engagement with vertical video than with conventional HD video. As a result, producers are starting to edit or encode their videos into vertical aspect ratios, so the picture — by default — occupies more of the vertical screen, and attracts more views. Figure 6.8 shows the most popular aspect ratios, and how much of the vertical screen is filled automatically.

Figure 6.8. Video aspect ratios on a mobile phone



The video Sky News produces for digital-only is in vertical format (1080 x 1430); square format (1080 x 1080), and traditional 16:9 (1920 x 1080). ITV News publishes its youth strand ‘The Rundown’ in vertical format (1080 x 1920); while Channel 4 News uses vertical for its ‘Uncovered' series on Facebook, and on Instagram’s video application (IGTV).

While news organisations are aware of the increasing trend for vertical video, it has been difficult for them to assess the precise benefit, as it is near impossible to do an A/B test, where they can publish the same video, at the same time, in two different aspect ratios and see which one is watched most.

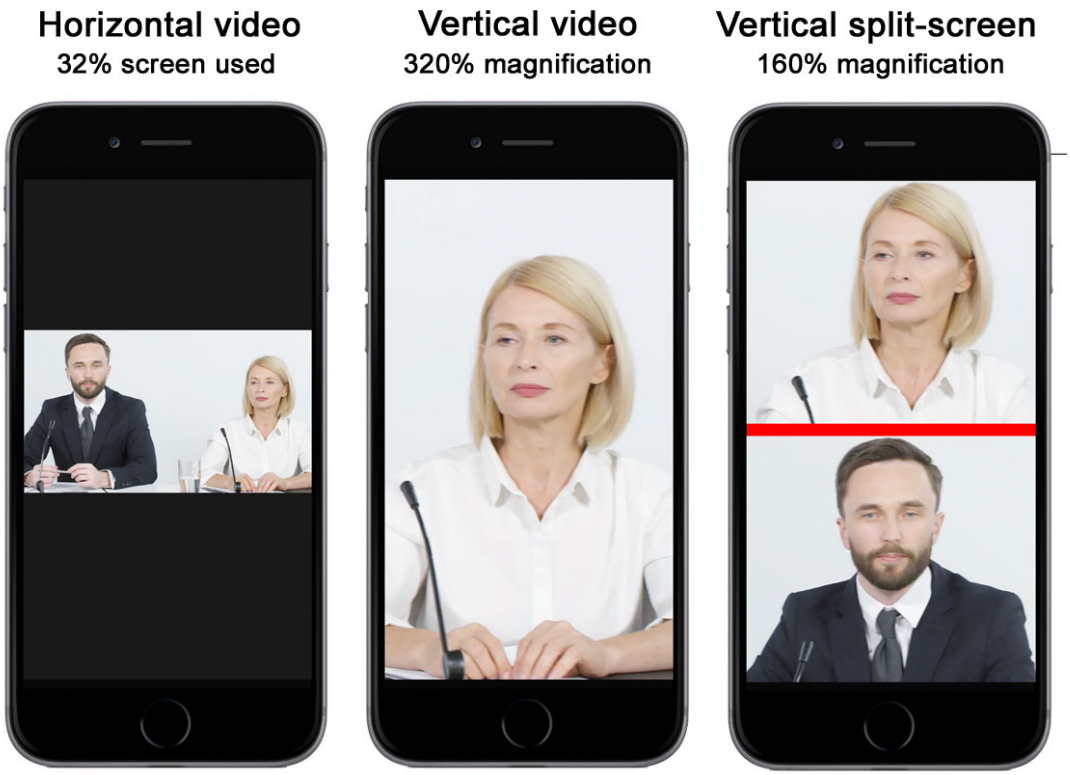
However, the bigger practical issue they face is it requires extra editing time — and hence money — to take a video that has been produced for broadcast in 1920 x 1080 and convert it into 1080 x 1920 for vertical display. Every shot in the video, individually, may need to be repositioned to prevent key areas of the widescreen picture being cropped from the much narrower vertical frame. Or sections of the video may need to be magnified to fill the vertical area, which means a loss of quality, unless the video was shot in a higher (‘4K’) resolution.

Figure 6.9 shows how a traditional 1920 x 1080 horizontal video looks if it is viewed on a phone held vertically — only 32 per cent of the screen is utilised.

If the same video is edited into a vertical 1080 x 1920 format, it is necessary to magnify it by 320 per cent in order to fill the screen. This loses image quality and prevents large parts of the original picture from being visible.

The final image shows an alternative way of editing the same video — split-screen — in order to reduce the magnification to 160 per cent, thereby saving picture quality, while showing most of the original image, albeit split into two halves.

Figure 6.9. Re-framing HD video for vertical video



If camera operators and producers know their intended platform is vertical, they could choose to shoot, accordingly. This means positioning key visuals in the centre of the frame. This is not ideal, aesthetically, if the same footage is used on a traditional 16:9 TV screen. There is a trade-off to be made, involving images not being ideal for one platform or another; losing image quality or spending more time editing.

6.8 Questionnaire #6 — Audience participation in production

To what degree, if any, do 16-34s participate in the production of their own news content that they share/upload to you, e.g., video, photographs, citizen reporting, tipoffs, etc.?

None of the major news broadcasters were developing user participation in the production of news content. The widespread feeling among them was they are professional journalists, who place strong emphasis on the bona fides of their work, and the reliability and trust viewers can place in it. The biggest concern with user generated content, or citizen journalism, was the provenance of stories filed by members of the public. Did they get consent from participants? Do they own the intellectual property rights in the material they file? Is the technical quality of the video and audio satisfactory for broadcast or streaming?

However, when there is a news event, at which members of the public are present before professional camera crews arrive, news broadcasters said generally they would solicit raw footage from the public, such as mobile phone video of a train crash or a terrorist attack. This is footage, which news teams would edit into their stories to augment their reporting. It is not citizen journalism.

The Sky News App has a section called ‘Your Report’, which asks:

> ‘Seen or heard something newsworthy? Add your comments and send us a photo or a video’.

Sky News told me ‘Your Report’ is not used widely. Most user generated content it acquires is, in fact, procured proactively by its editorial team scouring social media in the immediate aftermath of relevant news events to find eyewitness video of incidents. They reach out to users who have posted video on social media, and seek to procure it for broadcast.

6.9 Questionnaire #7 — Policies to attract 16-34s

What, if anything, are you doing specifically to attract 16-34s to your news content?

ITV News summed up the feedback from participants when asked what they do specifically to attract 16-34 year olds:

> ‘We don’t really think about it like that’.

Sky News echoed the sentiment saying it produces stories that have broad appeal, not ones that appeal to a specific demographic. The clue is in the word ‘broadcaster’. That is not to say this age group is ignored.

ITV News added:

> ‘We're being more subtle, more tangential with our targeting’.

It is more of a nuanced approach, where for example, within its general content, there are a few strands, for which knowingly there is a disproportionate number of young adult viewers.

ITV News noted race and identity politics are issues that appeal to younger audiences. It has a strand called ‘Young British and Muslim’, presented by

International Affairs Editor, Rageh Omaar; this has a deliberately positive tone about Muslims, and was created partly to counter much of the negative publicity about Muslims and Islam, post 9/11.

The broadcasters know their web and social media platforms skew towards younger people. This impacts the way in which these sites are designed and managed. Where there is content commissioned for digital-only, this too will skew towards the type of content preferred by younger audiences; content that is otherwise unlikely, or less likely, to be commissioned for broadcast.

For example, Sky News has a YouTube explainer series called ‘Off Limits’, for which 58 per cent of the audience is aged 16-34. It produced a story entitled: ‘Is CBD safe?’, which looked at issues surrounding the use of cannabidiol, or medical marijuana. Sky News said this story probably would not have been commissioned for the broadcast network.

ITV News also has a bespoke strand, created for an audience of teenagers aged 14-17. The broadcaster did a lot of market research before launching ‘The Rundown’. It is made for social media platforms — Instagram Stories, Facebook Stories and Snapchat. The video is edited in vertical mode, on the expectation most viewers will be watching on their mobile phones. The style is punchy, fast-moving, visually dynamic and colourful. Its presenters are twenty-something, which is older than the target demographic, but purposefully chosen to represent the ‘cool older cousins’ of the audience members.

Channel 4 News was the single exception among participants for being unabashed in its targeting of 16-34s. Channel 4 has a requirement built into its

statutory remit, to reach young audiences, as a core priority. It is part of its obligation as a public service broadcaster.

Channel 4 News' Head of Digital said:

> 'Reaching as many 16-34s with in-depth and quality content is one of the key objectives of Channel 4 News. The key method of doing this is simply by being on the social platforms where they are. Reaching 16-34s where they are, and where they consume other content, we have found, is the single best way to reach them, as a public service broadcaster. It sounds simple and straightforward but following a platform-centric approach in order to reach these audiences is a no brainer when we know that they are watching linear programming in slowly decreasing numbers; but also are less likely to come to our home page. We are reaching many more young people on social platforms than we are losing on television'.

In addition to placing stories made for television onto the social platforms, Channel 4 News said it was stepping up its production of bespoke digital-first or digital-only content.

'Brexit Explained' was:

> '…commissioned and made with the explicit purpose of reaching 16-34 audiences — which it did'.

‘FactCheck Explains’ is:

> ‘…aimed at the same age group, tackling complex political and social issues in order to correct swaths of misinformation on the platforms’.

And ‘Uncovered’ is a documentary series for young audiences, covering foreign affairs. It was commissioned and paid for by Facebook UK and is published in vertical aspect ratio.

6.10 Questionnaire #8 — Customisation and personalisation

To what degree do you change the substance or style of your news content — including customisation and personalisation — to appeal to 16-34s?

Channel 4 News said it tries consciously not to talk down to younger adult audiences when making news stories specifically for them. It believes this is a common mistake made by news producers, who end up trying to produce content suitable for the youngest of the 16-34 age bracket, which will seem patronising for older members of this group. In contrast, its producers are told to apply the same standards across the board.

It said:

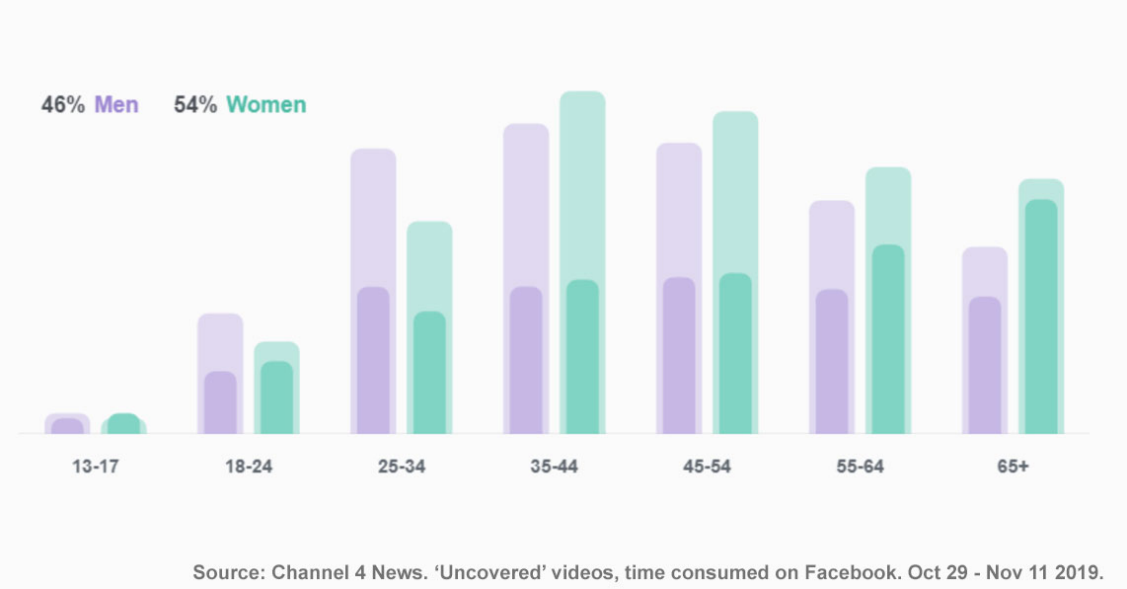
> ‘We attempt to keep the substance the same — the same high quality level of journalism that Channel 4 News is known for, the same depth and detail, but styled in a different way’.

This ‘style’ relates primarily to presentational style of the videos on social media. The videos often are the exact same stories (packages and interviews)

that appear on the nightly 7 o'clock news bulletin on television, but these have to be presented on each social platform in a manner that observes best practice of each platform. Much effort is focussed on choosing images for thumbnails, and good headline writing (Figure 6.7).

Channel 4 News said: the substance of the journalism remains consistent, even for digital strands that never appear on broadcast television, like 'Uncovered'. This strand covers complex and thought-provoking topics about international news, such as democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong and political uprisings in Sudan. 25-34s comprise a significant share of viewing for this strand; albeit it must be said, 'Uncovered' skews more to older age demographics (Figure 6.10).

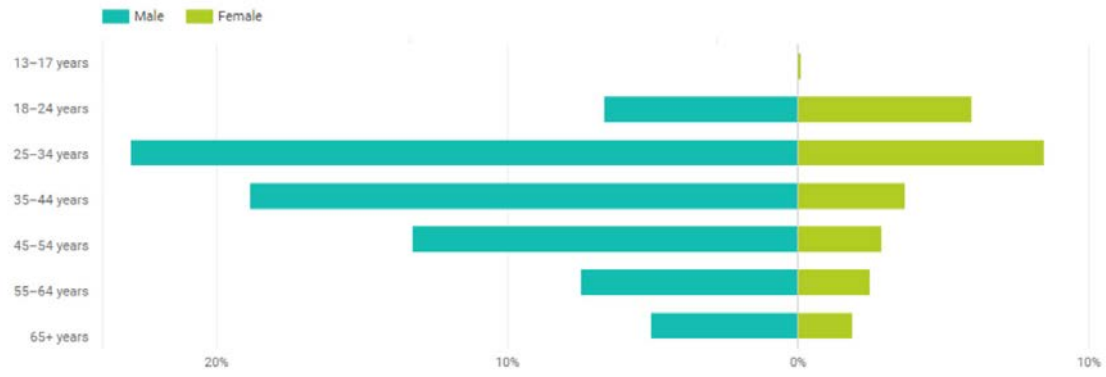
Figure 6.10. Channel 4 News: 'Uncovered' series, time consumed by age and sex during sample two-week window



There is a perceived wisdom videos need to be in very short, bitesize pieces in order to appeal to 16-34s. However, Channel 4 News found 16-34s can and do display a longer attention span if the content is good, and styled in the right way. This was evidenced in viewing data for its 'Rated' and 'FactCheck Explains' strands, where some episodes are as long as thirteen minutes. The average view of 'FactCheck Explains' on YouTube in the year to 30 September 2019 was 6.1 minutes; 73 per cent of this coming from viewers aged 18-34.

This willingness for young adult audiences to watch longer, short-form videos was echoed in Channel 4 News' experience with (audio) podcasts. An average episode of 'Politics: Where Next? with Gary Gibbon' is 35 minutes. In the year to 30 September 2019, it attracted 2.7 million downloads; total listening time was 30.3 million minutes; an average session was 11.3 minutes. Figure 6.11 shows 38 percent of these downloads came from users aged 18-34.

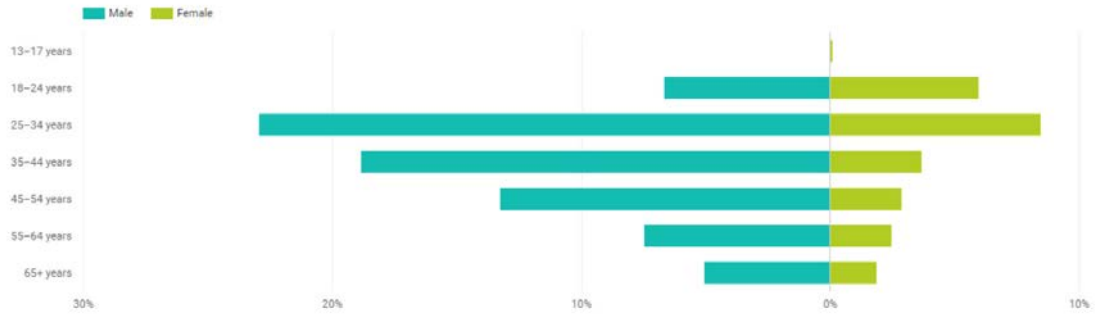
Figure 6.11. Channel 4 News: 'Politics: Where Next? With Gary Gibbon' podcast downloads by age and sex



Source: Channel 4 News. 'Politics: Where Next? with Gary Gibbon' podcast, views (downloads).. Oct 1 2018-Sep 30 2019.

A second podcast, ‘Ways to Change the World with Krishnan Guru-Murthy’ is 45 minutes long. In the same time period, this got 2.4 million downloads; total listening time was 31.2 million minutes; the average listening session was 13.1 minutes. Figure 6.12 shows 45 percent of downloads came from users aged 18-34 years old.

Figure 6.12. Channel 4 News: ‘Ways to Change the World with Krishnan Guru-Murthy’ podcast downloads by age and sex



Source: Channel 4 News. ‘Ways to Change the World with Krishnan Guru-Murthy’ podcast, views (downloads).. Oct 1 2018-Sep 30 2019.

Personalisation of content was seen as a double edged sword. It can make content more relevant to the individual viewer, but effectively it impedes that viewer from seeing content ordinarily they would not have selected. All news editors saw their job as that of a curator, selecting a variety of stories they judge as worth seeing. They consider themselves trusted by audiences to make those editorial decisions. Personalisation reduces the role of the editor; so the two functions are perhaps oxymoronic.

Certainly, personalisation is not done presently by any of the participants. It was seen as something pursued by technology platform-owners and news aggregators, not by publishers.

However, this depends on a precise definition of personalisation. There are several distinct forms. One is computer-driven, artificial intelligence (AI), where the software tracks a user's viewing habits, learns from this, and then feeds that user other similar stories. This is algorithmic curation, as done by YouTube and Facebook.

Another kind of personalisation is where users actively 'tick boxes' to self-select the categories of news that interests them, such as sport, entertainment, politics, etc. Self-selection is low tech, and easily performed by any news organisation on its website or mobile app. Already, the BBC News App does self-selection, allowing users to pick their favourite news topics — USA, Business, Entertainment, Europe, Technology, Politics — and put these into a section called 'My News'.

Participants felt themselves moving inevitably towards greater degrees of personalisation because that appears to be what the market wants.

6.11 Questionnaire #9 — Impact of technology platforms

What impact do the major technology platforms — Facebook, Twitter, Google, Apple , etc. — and news aggregators have on how you present news content to 16-34s?

Participants appeared stoical about the fact they have to be on platforms where the audience is. This is true for all age demographics, but it is markedly so for younger adults, who rely on social media more than older adults.

One broadcaster said:

> ‘You need to be in someone else’s environment and not rely on [the audience] coming to a bespoke app’.

Another lamented:

> ‘It’s incredible how much influence they [the social media platforms] have’.

Social media platforms provide a mechanism to reach hundreds of millions of people, on a global scale, in a matter of minutes; this is a much greater reach than any broadcaster on UK television. News publishers can tap into a share of this audience, indirectly — not always on their own pages — and tangentially, adjacent to non-news content.

All the participants were eager to say they were not chasing raw viewing numbers for profit, by which they meant using clickbait to maximise views and reach. Channel 4 News said:

> ‘We could have reached even larger audiences by pursuing viral videos and imitating what other media organisations were doing, in terms of re-uploading content that is performing well on rival pages. Instead, we chose to double down on high quality news content that we also felt could perform well’.

The participants were focussed on getting the right editorial strategies for the platforms and audiences; distinct from getting the highest volume of media traffic. In other words, they believe the ‘correct’ approach for news is not merely measuring how many people are watching on digital platforms. Of course, producers can never divorce themselves from the reality of viewing figures, but success was not seen as a simplistic linear equation. In fact, it was said:

> ‘…solely pursuing the ability to reach more people — rather than to get more people to engage deeply — is not a sustainable method. Instead we focus on ‘minutes viewed’, ‘average view duration', and ‘views’’.

This comment refers back to the earlier concept in this chapter about pursuing Diligent consumption rather than the Promiscuous type (also Table 2.2).

These issues were synthesised by one participant:

> ‘Technology platforms have a substantial effect on the presentation of the content, but much less effect on the precise substance of the content’.

This points to a risk felt by some editors that a push to get huge audiences might mean changing the news to something they would not recognise, like, or

agree with. The oft-quoted term was ‘dumbing down’ the news, referring both to the style of news presentation and the level of knowledge assumed of viewers. It was felt this threatened the substance of news, moving it towards more celebrities, gossip, pop culture and sensationalism; ‘tabloid news’ rather than ‘serious news’, as defined in my visual taxonomy (Figure 3.2).

News editors were conscious different social media platforms have different audience profiles. They observed: YouTube is more male; Snapchat is more female; Facebook increasingly is appealing to older adults. Also, the platforms are configured differently for video content, and have different ideal durations for video. YouTube was felt the most user friendly for video, whereas Snapchat was felt to be the least. Sky News claimed news aggregators were not particularly popular with younger adults, who rely primarily on social media.

6.12 Summary of Ofcom’s BBC News Review

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was established by Royal Charter in October 1922. Its current Charter, presented to the UK parliament in December 2016, states the BBC’s purpose includes:

> ‘To provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them… so that all audiences can engage fully with major local, regional, national, United Kingdom and global issues and participate in the democratic process, at all levels, as active and informed citizens’. (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2016).

BBC News is the world's largest broadcast news operation, spending £175 million in 2018-19 on 22,643 hours of news and current affairs programming across all platforms (Ofcom, 2019b, p.31).

In Ofcom's Review of BBC News and Current Affairs, published in October 2019, Ofcom concluded:

> 'BBC News is perceived by some as representing a mainly white, middle-class and London-centric point of view. A lack of diversity in the stories that the BBC covered, and the reporters and presenters on screen, was a strong concern raised by some people we spoke to during our research. This was especially true of younger people and people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Some audiences also felt that the BBC's news coverage represented a narrow view, with a disproportionate focus on south-east England and Westminster in particular'. (Ofcom, 2019b, p.21).

Young people also questioned how far BBC news was 'talking to me'. Typically they saw BBC News as 'dry and boring'. Rather than reflecting their interests, the BBC was perceived by this group as being more relevant to their parents. Younger audiences typically wanted to understand news from a global perspective. They were interested in international news, and thought the BBC focused too much on the UK (Ibid., 22).

Ofcom found 16-24s had a strong preference for personal perspectives and opinion-led journalism, citing examples of presenters Reggie Yates and Stacey Dooley, writing:

> '…this type of journalism helped them to make sense of the world and was presented in a more engaging way that they could relate to'. (Ofcom, 2019b, p.23).

While 'all individuals' spent an average of 14.1 minutes per day watching national news on BBC TV channels, the average daily minutage for those aged 16-24 was just 2.8 minutes. Only 23 per cent of 16-24s watch BBC News on television, a one-third drop in five years. (Ibid., 31).

The BBC News website was the most popular news website in the UK among all age groups, reaching 64 per cent of the population. Ofcom wrote:

> 'The BBC is the UK's most-used online news source. But it has long been aware of the challenge it faces in attracting and engaging younger people, who are increasingly consuming news via social media and news aggregator services… For some whom we spoke to, the BBC is just 'one of many' online news providers'. (Ibid., 4).

Ofcom concluded:

> 'If these trends continue, they could pose a significant risk to the BBC fulfilling Public Purpose 1. This requires that the BBC engages all

> audiences, so they can participate in the democratic process, at all levels, as active and informed citizens. There is a risk that if the BBC is able to reach certain audiences only fleetingly via social media, it will struggle over time to meet this obligation'. (Ibid., 29).

In January 2020, BBC Director of News, Fran Unsworth responded:

> 'The BBC has to face up to the changing way audiences are using us. We have to adapt and ensure we continue to be the world's most trusted news organisation, but crucially, one which is also relevant for the people we are not currently reaching. We need to reshape BBC News for the next decade in a way which saves substantial amounts of money. We are spending too much of our resources on traditional linear broadcasting and not enough on digital. Our duty as a publicly funded broadcaster is to inform, educate, and entertain every citizen. But there are many people in this country that we are not serving well enough'. (BBC, 2020a).

The new BBC strategy included shifting to a 'story-led' approach, where resources are focussed away from programmes and platforms and towards producing stories that appeal to audiences, irrespective of the media platform. It means a reduction in the number of BBC journalists and the number of stories covered. The BBC also announced increased investment in the BBC News app with unspecified plans for greater personalisation.

6.13 Summary of participant responses

There was significant concern, even embarrassment, within the television news industry at its failure to attract 16-34s to broadcast news. In the case of BBC News, its unwillingness to participate in this research implied a degree of apprehension about the potential political consequences it faces, if this failure continues. Among some, there was acceptance digital and social media is the 'new normal' for reaching the 16-34 age demographic; they seemed relatively relaxed about the inevitable decline in broadcast viewing among this audience.

Channel 4 News stood out for its enthusiastic and multi-headed targeting of young audiences. Unlike the other broadcasters, the requirement to target young people and to embrace new distribution platforms is written expressly into Channel 4's founding statute (Communications Act 2003, c198A). 51 per cent of its online news minutes were consumed by people aged 13-34. While other participants also had higher proportions of young people on digital platforms than they had on broadcast, this was not to the same degree as Channel 4 News.

A dilemma shared by all news broadcasters was the degree to which they move away from their duty to serve the general audience in an attempt to reach one subset of that audience. They emphasised they are 'broad'-casters, and not narrowcasters. Unlike digital-born news brands, they could not choose to target only one age group; instead they had to take a nuanced approach.

It was apparent news brands were responding to the fact different social media platforms attracted different age and sex demographics. Whilst Facebook and Twitter accounted for 83 per cent of the participants' followers (of all ages), Facebook was perceived as 'getting old'; consequently some participants had shifted their focus to developing Instagram, which is disproportionately favoured by 16-34s.

YouTube — as the pre-eminent video platform — was seen as a necessity, although the platform is not as 'social' as the other social media platforms, which lend themselves more to sharing and commenting.

The participants reported the key difference in behaviour between younger and older audiences was the former's propensity for watching individual stories as video on demand, whereas the latter preferred to watch live, linear or scheduled news programmes at specific times. Even when older audiences use digital devices, they tend to watch live newscasts.

Participants reported a sharp dichotomy between — what I have labelled — Diligent consumption and Promiscuous consumption (Table 2.2); those expressing the latter trait had very little brand loyalty or brand recognition. News broadcasters feared this trait was on the rise, and they have not successfully figured out how to deal with it.

There was virtual unanimity between the participants on what 16-34s want, by way of content sub-genres and editorial styles, namely: 'human stories' about

real people; stories with an emotional hook; ‘good news’ stories reporting something positive about humanity and the world; stories about diversity, identity and the environment, and stories featuring celebrities from show business and sport. Also, they want ‘explainers’ to decipher complicated issues and jargon; faster paced edits; use of graphics; all this, without the reportage being patronising or appearing overly keen to ‘look cool’.

There was some disagreement over story duration — whether everything should be kept short (1-3 minutes), or whether the audience's attention span is longer than this. Channel 4 News cited several examples of long-form content that was successful with younger audiences.

The issue of vertical video was vexatious. Most realised the benefits of engaging audiences in portrait-style video on mobile phones, but they were all struggling with the extra investment of time and money to deliver this. However, they were moving towards this, where they had dedicated digital-only content and specific budgets.

Audience participation in news production was virtually non-existent. The prevailing mindset among producers was: we create content and the audience consumes it. The model is narrative storytelling, rather than storymaking or co-creation.

Other than Channel 4 News, none of the broadcasters said they target specifically 16-34s. While they skew the style of content on their social

platforms towards viewers on those platforms — who are younger — the targeting of age, per se, was incidental.

The style of thumbnail images used on social platforms was both a part of the editorial storytelling and an overt marketing tool. Here, the techniques used for thumbnail images were designed to maximise appeal. This, again, had the incidental benefit of targeting younger audiences.

None of the participants reported using personalisation on their platforms. They felt algorithmic curation is a platform level technology, so it could only be applied by participants who have their own mobile apps and websites. Not all participants do. In any case, the vast majority of their traffic does not go to them directly. It arrives via Facebook, Google, YouTube, Apple, etc., each of which have their own algorithmic personalisation, which users would encounter first.

All expressed stoicism about the technology platforms, who have huge influence over the future of the news industry. Participants were resigned to the fact they have to put their content on these platforms because that is where the audience is.

Chapter 7
Conclusion

7.0 Conclusion

The main title of this thesis — ‘Old News: Young Views' — is a play on words that implies a dichotomy between news which is out of date, or for old people, in contrast with differing attitudes or consumption patterns among young people.

While young adult audiences (aged 16-34) increasingly are moving away from news on broadcast television, the industry is structurally and culturally hampered from making an effective response. As ‘broad’-casters, their role is to appeal to audiences of all ages; this means a one-size-fits-all approach to editorial strategy, in which the settled style and substance of news content increasingly is of little interest or relevance to young adults (Ofcom, 2019b, p.21; Coleman, et al., 2011, pp.38-39) .

Digital and social media platforms are treated as the poor cousins of the broadcast platform, in terms of resources made available to them; yet that is where 16-34s get most of their news. While the broadcasters recognise the younger age profile on these platforms, their digital strategies — for the most part — are not devised specifically to target that demographic.

Channel 4 News is a notable exception. Channel 4’s statutory remit gives it a duty to target young adults and to develop new technology platforms (Communications Act 2003, c198A), and its news brand has succeeded in

doing so. Channel 4 News' approach and performance with 16-34s on digital platforms represents best practice in the industry.

However, none of the major news broadcasters — BBC News, ITV News, Channel 4 News, 5 News and Sky News — have made in-roads into audience participation, co-creation and the 'storymaking' techniques that differentiate social media as a platform from the traditional monologue approach of the broadcast platforms (Berkowitz, 2011; Rosen, 2005).

Much of the broadcast industry, including regulators and politicians, are preoccupied with the issue of incidental news exposure, echo chambers and polarisation. Whereas the overwhelming finding in the literature is none of these is a significant problem for 16-34s. These issues are more problematic in older adults; those continuing their 'old media' habits online, and those who are already politically polarised (Heatherly, Lu & Lee, 2017; Flaxman et al., 2016; European Parliament, 2019).

It is uncontested young people on social media engage in 'news snacking' (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2014), wherein they skim headlines while doing other things, but it is not proven this is a form of consumption that is detrimental to democracy. In fact, a lot of the evidence suggests it may be beneficial, because social media users are exposed to a wider variety of stories (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2017), and experience more cross-cutting exposure than others (Flaxman et al., 2016).

I propose a new taxonomy of news consumption (Table 2.2), which melds together others' descriptions into four behavioural characteristics, ranging from

the least to the most engaged forms of consumption: Disconnected, Promiscuous, Customary and Diligent. Concerns about incidental news exposure can be re-framed as a perception of a reduction in Diligent and Customary behaviour, and an increase in Promiscuous and Disconnected behaviour. The evidence implies there has been a generational shift away from Customary toward Promiscuous, but there is no evidence to say there has been an overall decline in the volume of news consumed across all available platforms.

Notwithstanding the quantity of news consumed, there is a problem with the content of news itself for 16-34s. The broadcast model means there can only be one news agenda for all, and that agenda is designed by and for older adults. Younger audiences report the news is ‘boring’, ‘depressing’ and ‘all about war’. Many deplore the constant diet of negativity relayed by a cast of journalists, who do not seem to represent them (Ofcom, 2019b; Childwise, 2017; Coleman et al., 2011).

In Figure 3.2, I offer a new visual taxonomy of news using the RGB (red, green, blue) spectrum of light. Too often, what broadcasters define as ‘serious news in the public interest’ overlaps with the negative characteristics described by younger viewers. While broadcasters fear the label of ‘dumbing down’ if they do more ‘tabloid news’, few have managed to walk the tightrope of covering ‘serious news’, while employing editorial styles and techniques that humanise stories and make them interesting and relevant to young adults.

Greater personalisation of news content seems inevitable. UK news broadcasters presently are doing virtually zero personalisation, and that which they do is limited to the relatively insignificant area of self-selection, where users identify genres of stories that appeal to them. Meanwhile, social media users experience two additional types of personalisation, both of which downgrade the role of editors and news brands. Firstly, young people rely on social curation — using family and friends to refer them to news stories — rather than going directly to news sites. Secondly, technology platforms use algorithmic curation, powered by artificial intelligence, to feed users relevant stories, thereby reducing users' needs to search for themselves.

I conclude news broadcasters' storytelling editorial culture and their commercial business structures render them not fit for the purpose of engaging 16-34s. However, there is evidence for a new approach revealed by a synthesis of the literature, best practice and lessons learned from other industries.

In the early 2000s, Coca Cola discovered men perceived the Diet Coke brand as female, consequently few men would purchase the drink. Harvard Business School's Jill Avery labelled this phenomenon 'gender contamination' (Avery, 2012). She told Forbes Magazine:

> 'Gender contamination occurs when one gender is using a brand as a symbol of their masculinity or femininity, and the incursion of the other gender into the brand threatens that'. (Forbes.com, 2013).

After spending millions of dollars on failed advertising, the beverage company acknowledged defeat and, in 2005, launched Coke Zero, specifically for men.

Promoted by macho-looking sports men, the new drink was a success. Avery explained:

> ‘[Coke Zero] was a way to tell men, it's OK, here's your brand. Drinking this brand won't affiliate you with women’. (Ibid.).

Borrowing from Avery, I deduce the UK’s broadcast news brands have a problem of ‘age contamination’. Their image, their product, their style are perceived as for old people. 16-34s cannot be targeted adequately while their interests are subsumed into an amorphous blob with all other age groups. The solution is for broadcasters to create new brands, or brand extensions, specifically to target young adults with news and current affairs. These would need to be autonomous business divisions, with different managements, budgets and editorial staff from the main news brands. The point would be to create a separate culture and identity.

The BBC already has a ready-made sub-brand that could be expanded for this purpose. ‘BBC Newsbeat’ is the flagship news programme of BBC Radio 1, BBC1 Xtra and BBC Asian Network. It offers:

> ‘…a range of stories from original journalism to entertainment, politics and lifestyle news that are of interest to 16-29 year olds’. (BBC, 2020b).

The way forward is for BBC News to cede all responsibility for reaching 16-34s to an enlarged and autonomous BBC Newsbeat, whose remit should stretch across audio, video and textual media forms, and across radio, television and digital platforms. If other news broadcasters employed a similar strategy of

brand differentiation and specialisation — in other words ‘narrowcasting’ — those new brands would better serve the audience of 16-34s, to which they would singularly be devoted.

7.1 Discussion

There is a public perception young people are not consuming ‘enough’ news, or are not consuming it in the ‘correct’ manner. It is true young people are consuming it differently than older adults. Undoubtedly, there is incidental exposure to news and this appears disproportionately to affect 16-34s. But how best can we measure the quantity and quality of this new consumption?

Is sixty-seconds of exposure to ten brief headlines equivalent to one minute reading a single article? Or looking across media forms, how do we compare one minute of reading a written article with one minute watching a video report? Is a picture worth a thousand words?

One prejudice may be fewer news stories consumed in-depth is ‘better’ than many stories skimmed fleetingly. That would be purely subjective and not justified by any rationale, but it does appear to be the prejudice pervading much of the reporting of incidental exposure.

If young people are engaging in more incidental news exposure than older generations, the only certain thing we can say is: this is a difference, catalysed by social media. Beyond that, we venture into personal cultural bias in claiming this is a good or bad thing.

7.2 Recommendations for further research

Van Zoonen (1998) and Everbach and Flournoy (2007) alleged what is defined as ‘news’ is what male journalists think is important, which is different to what female journalists think is important. This focuses on the supply side; whilst on the demand side, Childwise (2017) found a difference in attitudes to news consumption by male and female teenagers (Figure 3.4). Additionally, I have found (Hawthorne, 2017) the female readership of the UK’s leading news magazines is substantially lower than the male readership — New Statesman (30 per cent); Economist (25 per cent); The Spectator (20 per cent).

So, an area for further research is: to what degree is there a gender gap in news consumption online? And what are the factors of style and substance within news that appeal to each sex?

Others (European Parliament, 2019) have pointed to gaps in the research on the relationship between social media and polarisation. A related area that overlaps computer science, media and psychology is research on customer journeys on news platforms, to better understand the variables in prediction models to be used in algorithms.

On 29 May 2020, it was announced:

> ‘Microsoft is cutting dozens of MSN news production workers and replacing them with artificial intelligence’ (Seattle Times, 2020).

Human journalists had been curating third party news stories for the MSN platform, and soon would be replaced by algorithmic curation.

This action cries out for research on the comparative performance of humans verses machines, and the resultant impact on viewing figures and audience engagement. Already, artificial intelligence is not limited to mere pre-selection of news content (Associated Press, 2000), further research is needed on how it might affect commissioning, writing and presenting of news.

The Press Association launched the character Ananova as a simulated newscaster in 2000. Ahead of her times, she was retired just four years later. Today, however, a million customisable Ananovas could be resurrected. Already, we have Amazon Alexa, Apple's Siri and Google Assistant as talking, virtual personal assistants. It is a small leap to use these AIs to create visual, talking heads — customisable, animated newsreaders delivering 'The Daily Me' (Negroponte, 1995), with personalised news content for every individual.

With more artificial intelligence-driven personalisation of content, further research is needed on the forms of human computer interaction that best engage viewers and consumers. How do people respond to different media forms — textual, graphical, audio, video — used by AIs to communicate information?

Chapter 8
Appendices

8.0 Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet	
Title of research study:	'Old News, Young Views: How UK news providers engage young adult audiences (aged 16-34) on digital and social media platforms.'
Summary of research:	Exploring how people aged 16-34 consume, interact with and possibly co-create news content on web, app and social media platforms; and how news organisations - rather than platforms and aggregators - are responding to this behaviour.
Participant:	*[News corporation i.e. limited company]* (The company is the participant, not any individual).
Overview of your requested participation:	You are invited to complete the attached questionnaire. You may answer **only the questions** you feel able to answer. The questions are purposely broad, so you may answer by a combination of: (i) a written reply; and/or (ii) an oral response during a face-to-face or Skype conversation between the Researcher and a relevant executive; and/or (iii) supplying Researcher with extracts of your own anonymous audience research and viewing/traffic data.
Why you have been invited to participate:	We are approaching all the principal UK broadcast news organisations.

Participant Information Sheet	
Possible benefits/ advantages from your participation:	- Increase knowledge of how 16-34 year olds consume news content. - Increase understanding of impact of digital platforms on news consumption. - Increase understanding of editorial/ technological techniques that successfully engage 16-34s in the consumption of news content.
Possible risks / disadvantages from your participation:	None. * No individuals will be named or identifiable in the research. * News organisations will be anonymised, unless you give permission for specific citations. * No comparisons will be made between named news organisations.
Confidentiality, anonymity & data security:	Your details will be held in complete confidence and we will follow ethical and legal practice in relation to all study procedures. Personal data (name, contact details, - audio/ video recordings) will be handled in accordance with the (UK) General Data Protection Regulation so that unauthorised individuals do not have access to them.
Who is organising and funding the research?:	The research is part of a Masters by Research degree, which is likely to be the basis of a PhD at the University of Birmingham. It is being self funded by the Researcher, Leon Hawthorne. Leon was formerly a World News Anchor for CNN and a Lobby Correspondent for BBC News. He has also previously worked as a consultant on digital content strategy for the London Evening Standard and Hearst Magazines.
Is there any reward / reimbursement / expenses?	No.

Participant Information Sheet	
What if there is a problem?	You will sent a copy of the preliminary write-up of your contribution; and invited to review this for accuracy. At this stage, if you are unhappy, you may request amendments. If you remain unhappy with those changes, you may withdraw your participation and your entire contribution will be excised from the research; and any data you have supplied will be returned or deleted.
What happens when the research ends?	You will be sent a copy of the final research paper.
Contact details:	
Researcher:	Leon Hawthorne. [Telephone ….] [Email……]
Academic supervisor I:	Dr Richard Langley Teaching Fellow in Film Department of Film & Creative Writing. University of Birmingham Birmingham B15 2TT [Telephone ….] [Email……]
Academic supervisor II:	Professor Scott Lucas Professor of American Studies Department of Political Science and International Studies University of Birmingham Birmingham B15 2TT [Telephone ….] [Email……]

8.1 Consent Form

Consent Form	
I, the Participant, acknowledge receipt of this Participant Information Sheet and herewith consent to participate in the research.	
Participant's Name: (Company)	
Participant Principal Contact:	
Participant's Signature:	
Date:	
Participant's Email:	
Participant's Telephone Number:	
Participant's Postal Address:	
Note on Withdrawal of Consent	
Participant may withdraw its consent to participate in the research by emailing and/or writing to Researcher and/or his academic supervisors at the address(es) above. Notification of withdrawal shall be given no later than April 30th 2020.	

8.2 Questionnaire

Questionnaire	
You may answer **only** the questions you feel able to answer.	
Overview:	
1	What **quantity** of news do people aged 16-34 years old consume on your web, app and social media platforms, compared to older age groups?
2	What, if any, difference is there in **how** news is consumed by 16-34s, compared to older age groups?
3	What, if any, difference is there in **when** and **where** - i.e. at what times of day, and location - news is consumed by 16-34s, compared to older age groups?
4	What, if any, difference is there in the **genres** and **styles** of news content chosen by 16-34s, compared to older age groups?
Audience Engagement:	
5	How do 16-34s **engage** with your news content that is different to older users? (e.g. Share, Comment, Like etc.)
6	To what degree, if any, do 16-34s **participate in the production** of their own news content that they share/upload to you, e.g. video, photographs, citizen reporting, tipoffs etc.
Your Editorial / Organisational Response:	
7	What, if anything, are you doing specifically to attract 16-34s to your news content?
8	To what degree do you change the substance or style of your news content - including customisation and personalisation - to appeal to 16-34s?
9	What impact do the major technology platforms - Facebook, Twitter, Google, Apple etc. - and news aggregators have on how you present news content to 16-34s?

8.3 Extrapolation from Office for National Statistics data

1. This is an attempt to calculate the number of people in the UK's 16-34 age cohort who are themselves the grown-up children of other members of the same cohort, e.g., an 18-year old child of a 34-year old mother. The ONS does not produce the exact figure, so it must be extrapolated from its other published data. From the workings below, I estimate the number is approximately **66,000.**

2. I begin by looking at the ONS data on live births, by age of mother. The below extract shows the number of babies born in 2018 to girls aged 18 years and younger. NB: there is an 18-year age gap between the youngest and oldest members of the 16-34 cohort.

Maternities: UK live births by age of mother, 2018	
Mother's age at birth of child	Number of live births
Under 14 years old	5
14	61
15	282
16	1,033
17	2,847
18	5,465
Total	**9,693**

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2019. Table 3

3. Assuming — a generation ago — the same number of young mothers gave birth, by age, as they did in 2018, I can calculate the number of grown-up children, now aged 16-21, whose mothers today (2018) are aged 34 or younger. From the calculation below, this comes to 15,777.

Calculation #1 for number of grown-up children aged ≥16 whose mothers are aged ≤34			
Child's age today	**Mother's age at birth of child**	**Mother's age today**	**# children born based on 2018 ONS data**
16	<14	≤29	5
16	14	30	61
16	15	31	282
16	16	32	1,033
16	17	33	2,847
16	18	34	5,465
17	<14	≤30	5
17	14	31	61
17	15	32	282
17	16	33	1,033
17	17	34	2,847
18	<14	≤31	5
18	14	32	61
18	15	33	282
18	16	34	1,033
19	<14	≤32	5
19	14	33	61
19	15	34	282
20	<14	≤33	5
20	14	34	61
21	<14	≤34	61
	TOTAL		**15,777**

4. However, the assumption that the same number of teenage girls were giving birth a generation ago — compared to 2018 — is incorrect. Eurostat / ONS data (below) show the number of teenage mothers aged 15, 16 and 17 years was much higher in the past. In 2004, there were 13.6 such births per 1,000 female population, whereas in 2014 it was 6.8 per 1,000 female population of the same age. So, the 15,777 calculation above must be a significant under-estimate.

Live births women aged 'Under 18', (per 1,000 women aged 15 to 17) in EU28 countries, 2004, 2013 and 2014		
	2004	2014
EU28	7.7	6.0
United Kingdom	13.6	6.8
Live births women aged 'Under 20', (per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19) in EU28 countries, 2004, 2013 and 2014		
EU28	15.4	11.4
United Kingdom	26.9	15.5

Source: Eurostat data, compiled by the Office for National Statistics (extract)

5. So, working with the (above) Eurostat / ONS figure — for 2004 — of 13.6 average live births per 1,000 girls aged 15, 16 and 17; combining this with the 26.9 average live births per 1,000 women aged under 20; we can do the following, Calculation #2. This gives a total of 66,303.

Calculation #2 for number of grown-up children aged ≥16 whose mothers are aged ≤34					
Child's age today	**Mother's age at birth of child**	**Mother's age today**	**UK female population aged mother's age (mid-2018)**	**ONS birth rate (2004) per 1000 women that age**	**Calculated number of grown-up children**
16	15	31	448,522	13.6	6,100
16	16	32	447,555	13.6	6,087
16	17	33	447,937	13.6	6,092
16	18	34	439,493	26.9	11,822
17	15	32	447,555	13.6	6,087
17	16	33	447,937	13.6	6,092
17	17	34	439,493	13.6	5,977
18	15	33	447,937	13.6	6,092
18	16	34	439,493	13.6	5,977
19	15	34	439,493	13.6	5,977
				TOTAL	**66,303**

6. My conclusion is: the number of people in the UK aged 16-34, who are the offspring of parents, who are also in the UK 16-34 cohort is: from Calculation #1 — 15,777 and from Calculation #2 — 66,303. Calculation #1 is an underestimate, because it is based on the teenage birth rate in 2018, which is dramatically lower than previously. Calculation #2 is more accurate, as it is based on the 2004 birth rates. So, whilst noting this number is based on births, and does not account for deaths, nor inward and outward migration, I deduce the number is 'approximately 66,000'.

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